

ADEPTS OF THE ARCAINE



M&M
SUPERLINK

VILLAIN SOURCEBOOK



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INTRODUCTION

Long before there were superhumans from alien worlds, grim avengers of the night, and atomic-born monsters, there was magic. Heroes wielded magic swords, wizards cast dread spells, and mystical monsters haunted primeval forests. Before the fantastic was explained away with superscience, atomic power, and alien technology, it was always the purview of magic.

Though our modern myths, our superheroes, often have their origins rooted in “comic book” science there are still many characters populating the universes of the large comic companies that draw their powers from magic. This commingling of the two paradigms is readily accepted due to the ancient tradition of magic permeating our stories and myths.

Magic is no less interesting in a roleplaying game setting. Characters with magical powers and origins often find themselves contending with an entirely different class of villain and traveling to bizarre locales that “normal” superheroes would never find themselves in.

The characters presented in *Adepts of the Arcane* are designed to bring that element of magic to your campaign. They can serve simply as antagonists that will introduce mysticism and magic into your game just by their presence in it. Or they can serve as enemies and archenemies for the magical heroes that may already exist in your game. Whatever the case, the twelve characters presented in this book are sure to serve to initiate your heroes into the greater mysteries of the magical and the unearthly.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Adepts of the Arcane features a variety of villains, anti-heroes and possible allies for use with the M&M system. Each character has a complete history and a couple of adventure hooks that make it easy to put them to use immediately.

Besides their obvious use as antagonists for your heroes, characters in this book can serve as samples of different villainous archetypes or can be used as the basis for creating a character with similar abilities. However you choose to use them, feel free to modify the characters in this book in any way you see fit. In addition to the characters’ backgrounds, vital statistics

WHAT IS THE INFINIVERSE?



Simply put, the Infiniverse is Big Finger Games’ own superhero universe. Our goal with this book is to not only start laying the groundwork for the Infiniverse setting, but more importantly, to show you some of the great characters that occupy that universe. Make no mistake, the characters in this book are written to be as readily adaptable to your own campaign as possible. If they are taken as is, these characters provide some insight into this new setting, but they can also be easily incorporated into any superhero campaign.

and game stats, you’ll find a variety of sidebars throughout that are designed to give you more opportunities to incorporate the characters and concepts presented in *Adepts of the Arcane* into your own game. You’ll find the sidebars under headers such as *Origin-In-A-Box™* and *Story Point*. The purpose of these sidebars is explained below.

The *Origin-In-A-Box™* sidebar offers ideas for a unique origin for a new hero. These ideas often stem from events in each character’s background and will thus give the hero an innate connection to the villain or ally as well as the campaign’s history. This can give rise to many adventure opportunities and will often give the hero a nemesis or rogue’s gallery to contend with.

The *Story Point* sidebar offers suggestions on incorporating a character’s background and history into your campaign. It provides opportunities for the heroes to take part in or witness a critical point in the character’s history. This allows for a more organic approach to introducing the character and can allow heroes to participate in the events that led the character to become the villain or anti-hero that they are today.

You’ll notice a slight difference in the way the

You should feel free to replace any heroes or organizations mentioned in this book with preexisting analogs from your own setting. For example, the Magister serves as the archetypal ultimate sorcerer who safeguards our world from the myriad dangers that lie outside our dimension. If you already have a similar character in your own campaign you can simply replace the Magister. If you want to use the characters and organizations presented in this book as is, then you can find more information on them in the glossary on page 76.

characters' backgrounds are structured. Beyond the usual entries for the character's history, personality, appearance, and powers and tactics, you'll also find sections entitled *In Game* and *Endgame*. The purpose of these sections is described below.

The In Game section will provide you with suggestions on how to use the character in your campaign. It will also give you a series of adventure hooks that can be used to create scenarios involving the character's activities. The In Game section will also usually give you some idea of the character's current plans or likely responses to the PCs interference in their schemes.

Since villains and some flawed heroes or vigilantes often meet their end as the result of their own hubris or misguided goals we have provided a section called Endgame. It has been noted that comic book heroes don't conform to world-wide cultural monomyth Joseph Campbell and others have written about, because most superheroes never complete their journey; their story never reaches an end. Instead they often adhere to the more simplified American monomyth of the outsider who solves the problems that have upset society's peaceful status quo only to disappear back into obscurity, or in the superhero's case, to disappear back into a secret identity. Since villain's need not adhere to the structure of any heroic myth, we have provided the characters in this book with a sort of villainous monomyth – an origin, villainous capers to play out in your campaign and, ultimately, an Endgame. Each Endgame will differ, some provide redemption or a resolution to the troubles that have inspired the character's villainy, while others provide a violent end, a "just desserts" for the villain whose fate is one of self-destruction. Of course, we're operating

in a superhero paradigm so mysterious deaths, resurrections, and rebirths are usually just around the corner, or on the next page. You should never feel pinned down by any of the ideas in this book; you can adapt, alter, and reinterpret any of these concepts or characters.

Finally, *Adepts of the Arcane* provides a brief look into the growing Infiniverse setting. This superhero universe will be expanded, explored and advanced with each new release in this new M&M Superlink line from Big Finger Games.

So, if you're ready... gaze deep into your preferred oracular or scrying medium and prepare to encounter the Adepts of the Arcane!

ARMAGEDDON GIRL

Annabelle Watson's life has traced a long road, from the depths of misery to the heights of heroism and back again, leading finally to the mouth of madness. Annabelle's parents were murdered under mysterious circumstances, and she spent much of her early years in an orphanage. Her early years were sad and lonely, but all that changed dramatically one day when she was thirteen. That day she learned that she had a long lost brother, Jimmy Watson. She also discovered her brother was the heroic Captain Astounding, the World's Most Magnificent Man. He could change into this fantastic figure just by shouting out "Astound Me" while holding his magic amulet—a gold disc that was emblazoned with the image of a golden flame on one side and four strange letters in an unknown language on the other. Annabelle had inherited an exact duplicate of Jimmy's amulet from her deceased parents, dropped off at the orphanage one day by a mysterious stranger, though she had never known the significance it held.

Shortly after discovering her family's secret, her brother was kidnapped by the malevolent Dr. Devon Darkheart, one of Captain Astounding's oldest foes. Annabelle trailed the villain back to his hideout, and saw her brother through a window, bound and gagged, unable to utter his magic phrase. She shouted out the words "Astound Me!" in desperation and was instantly enveloped in mystic white flame. She was transformed into the World's Most Magnificent Maiden—Annabelle now had all of the powers of Captain Astounding! After making short work of Dr. Darkheart and his henchmen, she and her brother took a quick flight around the globe to introduce the world to its newest heroine, Annabelle Astounding.

Later that same year, while on an adventure in England, the siblings met Flynn Goodman, another orphan and, they soon discovered, a distant cousin. Jimmy and Annabelle adopted Flynn as their stepbrother, and he too proved able to call

upon the same mystic flame that changed Jimmy and Annabelle. This allowed him to transform into Captain Astounding Junior! By 1942, the three were known worldwide as the Astounding Trio. Their fearless, fantastic exploits captured the imagination of people around the world. Their generosity, kindness, and youthful idealism gave hope to many in a turbulent, war-torn time.

Annabelle lived a fairytale existence for the next ten years; her life consisted of a never-ending series of amazing adventures. Along with her brothers, she brought the worst villains to justice and experienced breathtaking miracles no regular person would ever understand. She shared many of her exploits with her brothers, but accomplished all sorts of incredible feats on her own as well. She and the others were sometimes aided by the ancient wizard Ibrahim, whom they could call upon by traveling to top of the Mountain of Eternal Flame.

These wonderful exploits ended in 1953. Dr. Darkheart, the sinister criminal mastermind they had beaten time and time again, finally succeeded in putting an end to the Astounding Trio. This time, when he captured the kids in their secret identities, tying them up and gagging them, he didn't shove them into some complicated deathtrap and then make an untimely exit, leaving them unguarded and able to escape once more. He simply shot each one in the head with his .45 caliber revolver. Jimmy and Flynn died instantly. Annabelle was rendered comatose, and would have bled to death if the police hadn't arrived in time.

When Annabelle woke up in a hospital bed six months later, she was partially paralyzed. She later recovered to a degree, but the bullet caused irreparable nerve damage. She was left with a permanent limp, a bad stutter, and short-term memory loss. Dr. Darkheart had vanished, making good his escape before the police arrived and wherever he had gone, he had taken the magic amulets with him. Sadly, the Astounding Trio was all too swiftly

VITAL STATS: ARMAGEDDON GIRL — □ X

Quote: "I'LL TEAR THIS ROTTEN WORLD APART! I'LL BRING THIS WHOLE MISERABLE CITY DOWN AROUND YOUR EARS! EVERYONE WILL PAY FOR WHAT THEY DID TO MY LIFE!"

Real Name: Annabelle Watson

Aliases: Annabelle Astounding

Occupation: Unwitting agent of the Prime-Mortal

Legal Status: United States citizen

Identity: Secret

Marital Status: Widow

Known Relatives: Jimmy Watson (brother, deceased), Flynn Goodman (cousin, adopted brother, deceased)

Affiliation: None

Base of Operations: Mobile

Height: 5' 8" (5' 4" in her mortal form)

Weight: 150 lbs. (105 lbs. In her mortal form)

Hair: Gray

Eyes: Black (brown in her mortal form)

Distinguishing Marks: Wild, unkempt hair and weathered face

forgotten by most of the country, as in 1953 most costumed heroes were being called to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, many suspected of Communist sympathies. America did not seem to have a place for super-heroic champions anymore.

In the aftermath of this devastating tragedy, things got even worse for Annabelle. She had a great deal of trouble coping with the loss of her family, her health, and her powers. Earning a living was not easy for a disabled young woman with no family in the 1950s. She finally found work as in the stockroom of a department store, making barely enough to survive.

Eventually, she married Martin Davidson, an older, widowed floor manager for the store. Money was often tight and the couple had their share of quarrels, but they also soon had a son, James, named after her late brother Jimmy, and for a time they were happy together. But Martin, a chain smoker, succumbed to lung cancer only ten

son, and was never prouder than when he joined the military at age eighteen. Her happiness turned to ashes when James died in the abortive rescue mission ordered by President Carter during the Iran Hostage Crisis. The only source of joy in Annabelle's life died in a foreign desert, and Middle Eastern terrorists responsible for his death were never even punished. Even the United States government had let her down.

Annabelle went to pieces, falling into a deep depression. After she missed a few mortgage payments on her house, the bank foreclosed and evicted. She went to the bank and begged them for another chance, finally crying out that she had once been a great heroine, that she had saved that very bank from being robbed once, thirty-five years ago.

Bewildered by her crazed ranting, they tossed her out on the street. Annabelle was soon living in a trailer park, drinking far too much and subsisting on disability payments and food stamps, occasionally begging strangers for change.

On one cold night when Annabelle fell asleep praying for nothing more than a merciful death, she had a dream. She did not remember much, but she recalled that she was visited by a glorious being, whose

years after their son was born.

As a crippled, single mother, Annabelle and her son quickly descended into the ranks of the working poor. There was little work available to her, and what government aid they received barely let them scrape by month-to-month. Still, she was content to have a healthy, good



aura of might reminded her of the wizard Ibrahim. The man claimed

butch!

to be a spirit of justice, and said that Annabelle had been chosen for a special destiny. She was to be an agent of divine justice on Earth, and she would regain all that she had lost. But she had to agree to mete out justice mercilessly against all who had wronged her, to unleash the fullness of her wrath against the evil ones who had murdered her loved ones, taken her powers and ruined her life. She had to swear she would never hold back as she had done while a member of the Astounding Trio. She would be an agent of judgment, the harbinger of Armageddon on Earth, but she had to agree of her own free will.

Annabelle remembers agreeing enthusiastically, and being told she would receive a visit the next day from a heavenly messenger. She awoke the next morning, uncertain whether to believe in her dream. Then there was a knock on the door. A man handed her a box, smiled wordlessly, and departed. She opened the box and found two things: a business card and a black medallion which, despite its color, had to be her long lost amulet!

She placed the amulet around her neck, whispered a heartfelt prayer that this wasn't just a dream, and cried out "Astound Me!" She was suddenly consumed in an eruption of black fire. The ground beneath her trailer had cracked open, spitting out the gout of unnatural flame, and the flimsy walls of what had once been her home were blasted apart. She emerged from the black inferno reborn, her body once again surging with superhuman strength and vitality, her weaknesses and infirmities burned away by the flames. Gone were her filthy street clothes and cast-off shoes, replaced by the radiant raiment of the World's Most Magnificent Maiden, Annabelle Astounding!

In her hands she held the box with the business card, still intact. She flew off towards the address, trailing the black smoke of the conflagration in her wake. The dream had been true, and she would become an agent of judgment. She would bring justice to the foreign terrorists responsible for her son's death, the government that failed to punish his killers, the petty bureaucrats that forced her to live in squalor, the bankers that turned her out onto the street, the selfish young people who scorned an old woman begging for change. Surely this address was her first opportunity to prove herself to the spirits of justice who had chosen her.

The name on the business card was Vernon Derleth, a wealthy scientist and philanthropist whose home and offices were in the lush penthouse of a building he owned. She flew in through an open window and found herself in a lavish parlor, standing before a bald, withered old man sitting in a plush easy chair,

ARMAGEDDON GIRL

PL 14

STR

+1/+16

12/42

INT

+1

12

DEX

+0/+6

10/22

WIS

+1

12

CON

+0/+10

10/30

CHA

+0/+5

10/20

TOUGHNESS

+22

FORTITUDE

+10

REFLEX

+6

WILL

+3

SKILLS

Acrobatics 5 (+11), Bluff 2 (+7), Diplomacy 1 (+6), Intimidate 16 (+21), Knowledge (history) 1 (+2), Medicine 2 (+3), Notice 6 (+7), Profession (retail) 4 (+5), Sense Motive 1 (+2), Stealth 2 (+8)

FEATS

All-out Attack, Attack Focus (melee) 2, Blind-Fight, Chokehold, Improved Grab, Move-by Action, Power Attack, Startle, Takedown Attack 2

POWERS

Blast 12 ("Black Fire", *Power Feats*: Indirect; *Extras*: Penetrating), **Enhanced Strength 30**, **Enhanced Dexterity 12**, **Enhanced Constitution 20**, **Enhanced Charisma 10**, **Enhanced Feats 3** (Diehard, Rage 2), **Flight 6**, **Immunity 9** (life support), **Mind Shield 8** (*Flaws*: Not Usable Against Emotion Affecting Powers), **Protection 12** (*Extras*: Impervious), **Super-Senses 3** (Direction Sense, Low-Light Vision, Ultra-Hearing), **Super-Strength 4**

DRAWBACKS

Normal Identity (Uncommon), Power Loss (all powers, with loss of amulet, Uncommon)

COMBAT

Attack +10, +12 (melee), Grapple +32, Damage +16 (unarmed), +12 (blast), Defense +6, Knockback -17, Initiative +6

TOTALS

Abilities 6 + Skills 10 (40 ranks) + Feats 11 + Powers 164 + Combat 32 + Saves 2 - Drawbacks 16 = 220 PP

dressed in a fine silk robe, a glass of port in his hand. Annabelle knew him immediately, for she could

STORY POINT



Darkheart's murder can become an event in your campaign if you establish the former villain as a prominent NPC in your game. After the war, Darkheart did indeed turn away from his life of crime and sought to redeem himself. Now, operating under the alias of Vernon Derleth, he is an elderly philanthropist and is a benefactor to various superheroes and superteams. He could even be the PCs' benefactor, having supplied them with funds or resources for the construction of their headquarters or other crime-fighting equipment. His death and the discovery of his true identity and violent past will come as quite a shock. For now, the exact motive behind his murder and the identity of his killer must remain a mystery.

never have forgotten the evil in those eyes. It was Dr. Darkheart, the man who had murdered her family and ruined her life.

Dr. Darkheart recognized Annabelle as well. The old man pleaded with her, told her he had repented, found God, and given millions to charity, and that he thought of her slain brothers every day. Annabelle realized Dr. Darkheart was sincere, that he genuinely regretted the pain he had caused her. She made him scream for hours before granting him the release of death.

Standing over the ruined remains of the old man's body, Annabelle understood now the harsh nature of the retribution she had been chosen to wreak upon the world. No longer would she be Annabelle Astounding, but an agent of God's righteous anger, the harbinger of a long-overdue apocalypse. From now on, she would be Armageddon Girl.

As she streaked off into the sky to continue her new mission, Annabelle's true patron watched happily. The Prime-Mortal remembered suggesting the murder of the Astounding Trio to Devon Darkheart years before, and his disappointment when the man had been unable to bear the guilt and crumbled into a simpering morality rather than becoming a greater force for evil (see page 52 for more on the Prime-Mortal). It had actually taken the Eternal Corrupter some time to recover the amulets which the former villain had sold to wealthy occultists all those years before, hidden as they were by the Magister's spells of concealment. Though he had only managed to find two of the three, he knew now that those two would be enough to help him bring untold suffering to the world. As Armageddon Girl flew towards Iran, her very limbs shaking with the fury of her terrible

thirst for revenge, the Prime-Mortal felt an emotion which, in any other being, would have been called pride.

In the years since, Armageddon Girl has embarked on a one-woman war against the world. She has toppled government buildings, razed banks, ravaged army bases, terrorized upscale shopping districts, and destroyed the headquarters of several major tobacco companies. Armageddon Girl has caused several international incidents in her indiscriminate assaults against "terrorists" in Iran, killing hundreds of troops and causing billions in property damage. Always, she has vanquished the scores of superheroes who have sought to end her hate-fueled rampage. She is currently one of the Top 10 most wanted superhuman menaces on the planet.

PERSONALITY

Annabelle Watson has been warped by decades of alcoholism, bitterness, poverty, and tragedy. She has only contempt for a world that showed her nothing but cruel indifference and disappointment. Though she tells herself that she is simply tearing down a rotten, corrupt society, she is actually just lashing out to assuage her own pain. She holds special contempt for the new generation of superheroes who fight against her, telling them that they have no respect for a hero who was fought for justice before they were born.

Despite her madness, Armageddon Girl retains some vestiges of her old morality. She will never intentionally harm children, the disabled, or the elderly. She will also not destroy synagogues, churches or the like and will stay her hand against religious figures, though her anti-Islamic hatreds have caused her to consider Muslim mosques and clerics fair game. She still will not break her word, steal from the poor, attack a helpless opponent, or commit any act which could be called cowardly. Despite her ongoing campaign of destruction, she believes herself to be an agent of higher powers and conducts herself with what she thinks of as dignity and honor. Armageddon Girl's mind is slightly clouded, and she honestly doesn't seem to realize the full extent of the pain and carnage her actions inflict. Whether this is due to some action on the part of the Prime-Mortal or the result of her decades of alcoholism and depression is not known.

APPEARANCE

In her mind's eye, Armageddon Girl is still a tall, lithe young woman with flowing honey-blonde hair, twinkling chocolate-brown eyes, and rosy apple

cheeks. She is convinced the Prime-Mortal has restored her to her prime, that in her superpowered form she is again beautiful, appearing no older than a youthful forty. In reality, she looks almost the same in A-Girl's body as she does in Annabelle's, still showing the ravages of age, poverty, and alcoholism. Though her body is stronger and straighter, her worn-looking face reflects every minute of her rough 78 years. Her hair is a silver-white, wild and unkempt, her hands are spider-veined and spindly, and her teeth are broken and yellow. Her eyes are angry pools of the deepest black, a reflection of the rage she feels within. Armageddon Girl is not totally physically identical to the mortal Annabelle; her super-powered form is several inches taller and considerably more muscular, with longer hair and sharper features (a DC 25 Notice check would alert a careful observer to the resemblance between the women). As mentioned above, Annabelle's mental perceptions are somewhat warped, preventing her from seeing that her aged condition carries over when she changes into A-Girl. For his part, the Prime-Mortal finds the sight of a wrinkled crone besting the world's greatest champions on a routine basis to be perversely amusing. Ironically, she still wears the cheerful colors she first donned as a light-hearted teenage superheroine. Her costume consists of a blue-and-yellow body stocking emblazoned with twin silver lightning bolt emblems, topped off with a gold tiara and bright red boots.

POWERS AND TACTICS

Armageddon Girl is immensely strong and fast, nearly impervious to harm, and able to fly at fantastic speeds. She can also call forth jagged great gouts of black flame that burst through the ground to strike at her enemies by shouting "Astound Me!" This is the same effect that causes her transformation from Annabelle to Armageddon Girl, but her supernatural reflexes allow her to use it without risking being caught in the center of the blast herself and experiencing an unwanted transformation.

In combat, Armageddon Girl uses little in the way of complex tactics. She usually begins a battle by unleashing a torrent of mystic flame against her foes and then simply flies at her opponents at top speed, pounding away at anyone left standing with her invulnerable fists until they fall. She rants maniacally the whole time, shouting that her fantastic deeds were forgotten and horrible injustices were done to her. Armageddon Girl exists to wreak destruction; she never really has any clear plan or goal in mind besides leveling her chosen target. She rarely works

ORIGIN-IN-A-BOX



During their travels around the world, both Jimmy Watson and Flynn Goodman enjoyed the company of many a young lady. You are the grandson or granddaughter of one of the two young men who were once part of the Astounding Trio. Your legacy was only recently revealed to you, when you received, from an anonymous benefactor, Jimmy Watson's long missing magic amulet. There was a simple note with the amulet, it read: "This amulet is your birthright, with it comes a legacy of adventure and heroism. Use it with a measure of wisdom, and a measure of selflessness." The words were already on your lips, as if you had known them all along, "Astound Me!"

This origin provides a character with a heroic lineage and potential for many adventures as he or she rediscovers the Astounding legacy and all the wonder and adventure it entails. The question remains however, who returned the missing amulet, and why? Perhaps it was some benevolent entity or god, opposed to the Prime-Mortal, trying to restore the balance. Or it may have been the amulet's original creator, the Magister, working as always to ensure the safety of mankind.

Astounding Legacy, Template

Device 30 (hard to lose; "Astounding Amulet")
Astounding Amulet: Blast 10 ("Mystic Flame", *Power Feats*: Homing 4, Ricochet, Split Attack; *Extras*: Linked to Disintegrate, Penetrating),
Disintegrate 6 ("Mystic Flame", *Power Feats*: Homing 4, Ricochet, Split Attack; *Extras*: Linked to Blast), **Immunity 9** (life support), **Protection 10** (*Extras*: Impervious), **Super-Strength 10**, **Enhanced Strength 10**, **Super-Speed 4** (*Power Feats*: Rapid-Attack, Alternate Power – **Flight 10**), **Enhanced Feats** (Quick Change 2, Precise Shot 2)
Drawbacks: Normal Identity (Major, Uncommon)
Cost: 117 PP

Note that these powers differ greatly from Annabelle's. She now uses a corrupted version of her original amulet, and her powers have altered accordingly.

with other supervillains, as she still sees herself as pure and righteous. Annabelle is so focused on her inner feelings of anger, guilt, and shame that she is unlikely to respond to any attempts at reason.

IN GAME

Armageddon Girl can be used anytime you need to shake things up. Her ideas of revenge can take her nearly anywhere in the world, and when she arrives at her destination it's never long before she begins a rampage of destruction and death. Her presence can serve to inject some action during a lull in the game, or as a continuing reminder of her growing menace as one of the Top 10 most wanted supervillains on the planet.

There are two ways to introduce this character into your game. You can make her part of the campaign's recent history, establishing that she has already become one of the greatest superpowered menaces on the planet, meaning the PCs have heard about her exploits "off-panel." The other approach is to have her rise to prominence occur during your campaign. The heroes would hear about her on the news, through contacts or fellow heroes, or could even attend the funeral of one of her superhuman victims. In short, the shadow of the growing threat Armageddon Girl represents would loom over the heroes for a time, presaging the inevitable day when they finally meet this living engine of destruction. More ideas for incorporating A-Girl into your game follow:

KID APOCALYPSE



Kid Apocalypse (PL 8/ Sidekick Rank 27)

Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+6), Notice 4 (+4), Stealth 4 (+6)

Feats: Acrobatic Bluff, Dodge Focus 6

Powers: **Blast 8** ("Black Fire", *Power Feats:* Indirect; *Extras:* Penetrating), **Flight 6**, **Nullify 8** (all powers, *Extras:* Nullifying Field), **Protection 8** (*Extras:* Impervious),

Combat: Attack +8, Grapple +8, Damage +0 (unarmed), +8 (blast), Defense +8, Knockback -8, Initiative +2

Saving Throws: Toughness +8, Fortitude +4, Reflex +6, Will +4

Drawbacks: Normal Identity (Uncommon), Power Loss (all powers, with loss of amulet, Uncommon)

Totals: Abilities 6 + Skills 3 (12 ranks) + Feats 7 + Powers 77 + Combat 32 + Saves 12 - Drawbacks 5 = 132 PP

Show Some Respect: Casually perusing a news magazine, Armageddon Girl comes across a story about her old neighborhood, where she and her brother had many of their early adventures. The

article details how the once prosperous district has been in decline for years, beset by poverty, crime and drug abuse. The neighborhood now consists of little more than low-income housing and run-down businesses. Worst of all, the Astounding Family museum, founded in honor of the heroic family by a grateful city in the 1940s, has been forced to close as the city government finally cut off all funding. Attendance had been in decline for years, and the museum had become little more than a shabby, one-man operation. Enraged by the disrespect shown to the Astounding Trio's memory, A-Girl embarks on a campaign of terror against the city officials who voted to close the museum. She trashes their cars, demolishes their homes, and even smashes her way into City Hall and threatens to bring the entire city down around their ears unless funding is restored. City officials can't give in to blackmail of this kind, so federal and state authorities are called in to deal with the situation. When they prove insufficient, the city calls upon the heroes to protect them from the wrath of the scorned ex-heroine. This can be a good introduction to Armageddon Girl and her past as Annabelle Astounding. By placing the museum in the heroes' city it can serve to illustrate the Astounding Trio's forgotten—but nonetheless impressive—legacy, since the museum had even escaped the heroes' notice.

Kid Apocalypse: After a particularly nasty encounter with the U.S. Military, A-Girl goes to ground and hides out in a condemned building. It is there that she meets a young runaway (perhaps a relative of one of the PCs). As Armageddon Girl espouses her "worldview", the troubled adolescent is attracted to A-Girl's particular brand of nihilism. It is during this time that the Prime-Mortal, in his guise as a "spirit of justice," appears before the runaway girl and presents her with a corrupted version of Flynn Goldman's old amulet. The girl becomes Kid Apocalypse, A-Girl's sidekick and partner in destruction. The heroes are faced with the dilemma of rescuing the young girl from the corrupting influence exerted by Armageddon Girl and the Prime-Mortal.

Not Quite Armageddon, But Close: The Prime-Mortal has grown a tad impatient. While human beings continue to war amongst themselves over meaningless differences, despoil the planet through pollution, and commit acts of genocide, they have yet to really embrace the destructive potential of nuclear weapons and after such a promising start at the end of World War II. While the Prime-Mortal has no interest in ushering in worldwide nuclear apocalypse—at

least not yet—he now wants to indulge in a bit of radioactive fire and ruin. He has decided India and Pakistan are ripe for a dirty little nuclear exchange. The two countries have been teetering on the brink of war for years, and both can afford to lose a few million inhabitants each. And who better suited for stirring up a conflict than Armageddon Girl, his favorite (and most powerful) corrupted heroine?

The Prime-Mortal once again appears before Armageddon Girl in the guise of the spirit of justice. Interrupting her in the middle of a rampage in Great Britain, tearing down one of the country's oldest banks because it had recently bought out the U.S. bank that had once evicted her (making it guilty by association), the Prime-Mortal explained that he had come because her assault against Iran had failed to deliver justice to those responsible for her son's death. In fact, the leaders of the Iranian group that seized American hostages had been expelled from their home country and were now in Pakistan, a Muslim nation purported to be an ally of the U.S., but that actually served as a refuge for all manner of terrorists. The mystery man went on to say that the people she wanted were being harbored in the city of Kashmir, but that even he was unable to pinpoint their exact location. But everyone in the city was guilty of harboring the terrorists, so Armageddon Girl must find some way to punish them all. The Prime-Mortal is misleading Annabelle in numerous ways, but she does not follow world events enough to see through his deception, and the Eternal Corrupter is an extremely convincing liar.

Armageddon Girl is now on her way to Pakistan bearing a relatively low-yield nuclear warhead, no more than a few kilotons, but more than sufficient to obliterate the city. She plans to detonate the device in the skies above Kashmir. The Prime-Mortal knows that the Pakistani government will surely hold India responsible for the bombing of Kashmir and retaliate accordingly, launching their own nukes, and precipitating a brief but devastating exchange that will cause millions of deaths before the matter is sorted out.

The PCs have been called in by both the US and Russian governments. Armageddon Girl has liberated the nuclear weapon from an obscure Russian military silo, trashing several army units, a squad of fighter planes, and one superhuman operative in the process. Both American and Russian surveillance systems have her heading to the India-Pakistani border, but all attempts to warn the neighboring governments of her approach have been futile (the Prime-Mortal's handiwork). The U.S. equips the PCs with an experimental plane fast enough to allow

them to intercept Armageddon Girl, but can they defeat one of the most formidable villains on the planet while preventing an atomic bomb blast at the same time?

ENDGAME

Armageddon Girl stands as evidence of the corruptibility of a superhero. Her spirit was poisoned by the pitfalls of everyday life, and the Prime-Mortal did little more than return her fantastic powers to her and bid her to use them to express the hate already present within her.

When the heroes have overcome impossible odds and averted some world-threatening crisis, Armageddon Girl may show up to tip the scales. It may be that during one of these crisis points that always seem to threaten the planet, Armageddon Girl will finally meet her end trying to bring about the destruction and death that her master craves.

If instead, A-Girl should ever find redemption or have a moment of clarity when she realizes what she has become, she will use all of her power against the one true and palpable evil that exists in her life, the Prime-Mortal. She would no doubt meet her end in such a conflict, but might do enough damage to the entity and his schemes that some lasting good may indeed result from her sacrifice.

THE ASPIRANT

The Aspirant's first clear memory is awakening, naked and shivering, in the middle of a blasted, blazing field, encircled by flickering silver-white flames. A voice then came rustling through the burning rushes, speaking to him from somewhere beyond the plain. *"Do not be afraid", the voice said, "You are in no danger. You know this. These flames cannot consume you. You may command them as you wish. You have been selected to wield the Living Flame, the Cold-Fire, one of the most elder sources of eldritch energy".* The voice was calming to him, reassuring him even as the circle of fire closed upon him. *"You are a champion now. The past is unimportant, while the future is now yours to claim. This power is your birthright. Use it to achieve your destiny."* He knew the unseen voice was speaking the truth; he had nothing to fear from the flames, for he was their master. With a motion of his hand he called the flames to him, drawing them into his body. For a moment there was indescribable pain, as if he were being stabbed by a thousand spears made of ice, and he fell writhing to the ground, but he endured the pain and pressed forward, determined to prove worthy of the power he had been given.

After several agonizing minutes, or perhaps hours, the pain was gone, and he stood upright, serene and victorious. He had conquered the flames, conquered his fear, and now he would go forth and conquer his future. He knew that many challenges lay ahead of him, for he was certain that grand feats would need to be accomplished before his true destiny was revealed. Finding his nudity unbecoming, he called upon the mystic flames to fashion suitable raiment; he then strode from the field and made his way to the interstate, walking nearly one hundred miles to the nearest major city, Chicago.

Since that night he went about forging a new existence. He first became a superhero almost by accident; when he first entered the city he wandered into the seamier district, where a homeless, amnesiac stranger would not be out of place. After a few days of aimless wandering, where he observed numerous drug deals, shakedowns, and violent altercations, he was moved to believe that it was his obligation to clean up his new home – that this would be a proper use of his power. Dubbing himself the Aspirant (for he aspired to greatness), he waged a minor war against the district's criminal elements. The Aspirant achieved some fame as the neighborhood protector.

Using a portion of the funds he seized from drug lords, he established a civilian identity as Malcolm Magnus, a dealer in occult books, curios, and oddities. He was eventually invited into the ranks of the city's superheroes, serving with one of Chicago's preeminent superteams. But after awhile, Malcolm began to feel too restrained by the code of ethics heroes were supposed to abide by; he began acting more like an anti-hero or vigilante. Even this role proved too restricting, as Malcolm soon found he had almost an obsessive need to seek out and acquire mystical artifacts, through extortion and theft if necessary. Soon, several ancient Egyptian and Sumerian relics were stolen from Chicago museums such as the Art Institute and the Field Museum, and all the evidence pointed to the Aspirant as the number one suspect.

The Aspirant was soon wanted for a string of

robberies, and was pursued by both the police and his former teammates. Yet when the vengeful Armageddon Girl and the brutish Troll started a slugfest (he had hunted down A-girl in hopes of cashing in on the enormous bounty on her head) in the city's downtown shopping district, the Aspirant was first on the scene. He battled courageously to contain the two rampaging villains until a host of other heroes and a National Guard battalion arrived, and sustained terrible injuries as a result of the battle. A grateful city government dropped all charges against him.

Since then, the Aspirant has continued to act as both hero and villain. He is one of the most unpredictable paranormals currently active. He has relocated several times since he first showed up in Chicago, moving between cities and states seemingly at random. The Aspirant has been a hero in Atlanta, a villain in Kansas City, and both in New York. So far he hasn't been able to settle down in any one role or location.

In reality, nearly everything that the Aspirant believes about his past is false; the memory of his "origin" is no more than a fabrication. The Aspirant is not even really human – he is actually a creation of the Magister, Earth's Archadept Arcane. The Magister hopes to literally build a successor capable of one day assuming his cosmic duties. To this end he constructed a sort of occult android, a thing combining aspects of a clone, golem, and homunculus. The Magister imparted a measure of his own life essence into this construct, granting the being free will and self-awareness, as well as the potential to achieve great

mystic power. He then set his creation loose in the world, to gauge the success or failure of his efforts. The Magister continues to carefully observe the results of his handiwork; while the Aspirant's checkered career thus far has been a bit disappointing, but his creation is only a few years old and still displays promise...

PERSONALITY

The Aspirant is gifted with ambition and intellect, but often becomes frustrated because he has so far been unable

VITAL STATS: THE ASPIRANT

Quote: "I AM DESTINED TO ACHIEVE GREATNESS ... SOMEHOW."

Real Name: Malcolm Magnus

Aliases: None

Occupation: Collector of occult paraphernalia

Legal Status: Citizen of the U.S. wanted for suspicion of attempted murder, assault and robbery

Identity: Secret

Marital Status: Single

Known Relatives: None

Affiliation: None

Base of Operations: Mobile

Height: 6'2"

Weight: 210 lbs.

Hair: Bald

Eyes: Gray

Distinguishing Marks: Eyes that smolder with silver-white flames when he feels emotion

to find a clear purpose. He adopted the persona of a costumed adventurer because of the power and respect commanded by such super-beings in the modern world. The Aspirant hopes that he will discover his true destiny among his peers. While he has yet to enjoy any spectacular successes as a lawman, vigilante, or outright criminal, the Aspirant still hopes that he will discover his true destiny among his superpowered peers.

He is basically decent and moral, but is given to sudden fits of anger and selfish behavior.

The Magister attempted to create the Aspirant with a strong sense of right and wrong while at the same time endowing him with the ambition and ego a worthy successor to the Magister's role would need, but was only partially successful in fusing these qualities into a stable mentality. As a result, the Aspirant is confused about his ethical choices, and vacillates between heroism and villainy. He has so far been unable to fully commit to either, sometimes even changing sides in the midst of a battle!

The Aspirant is constantly searching for the opportunity he needs to establish himself as a major player in the superhuman community, to realize the future he imagines for himself as a grand figure on the world stage. He is almost instinctively drawn to other mystical beings and objects, always hoping to discover some means to tap into them and gain even greater arcane might. Despite the admonition of the "voice" that he heard that night in the field that the past was not important, the Aspirant has never been able to rid himself of the curiosity he feels about his origins, and furtively

seeks for clues as to his history. He is also almost irrationally romantic, and over the years has become almost instantly infatuated with various women, usually those he perceived as being unusually powerful or unique in some way.

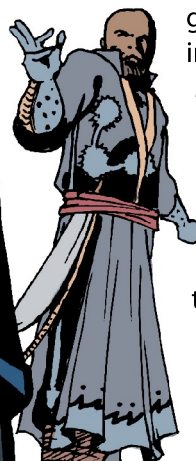
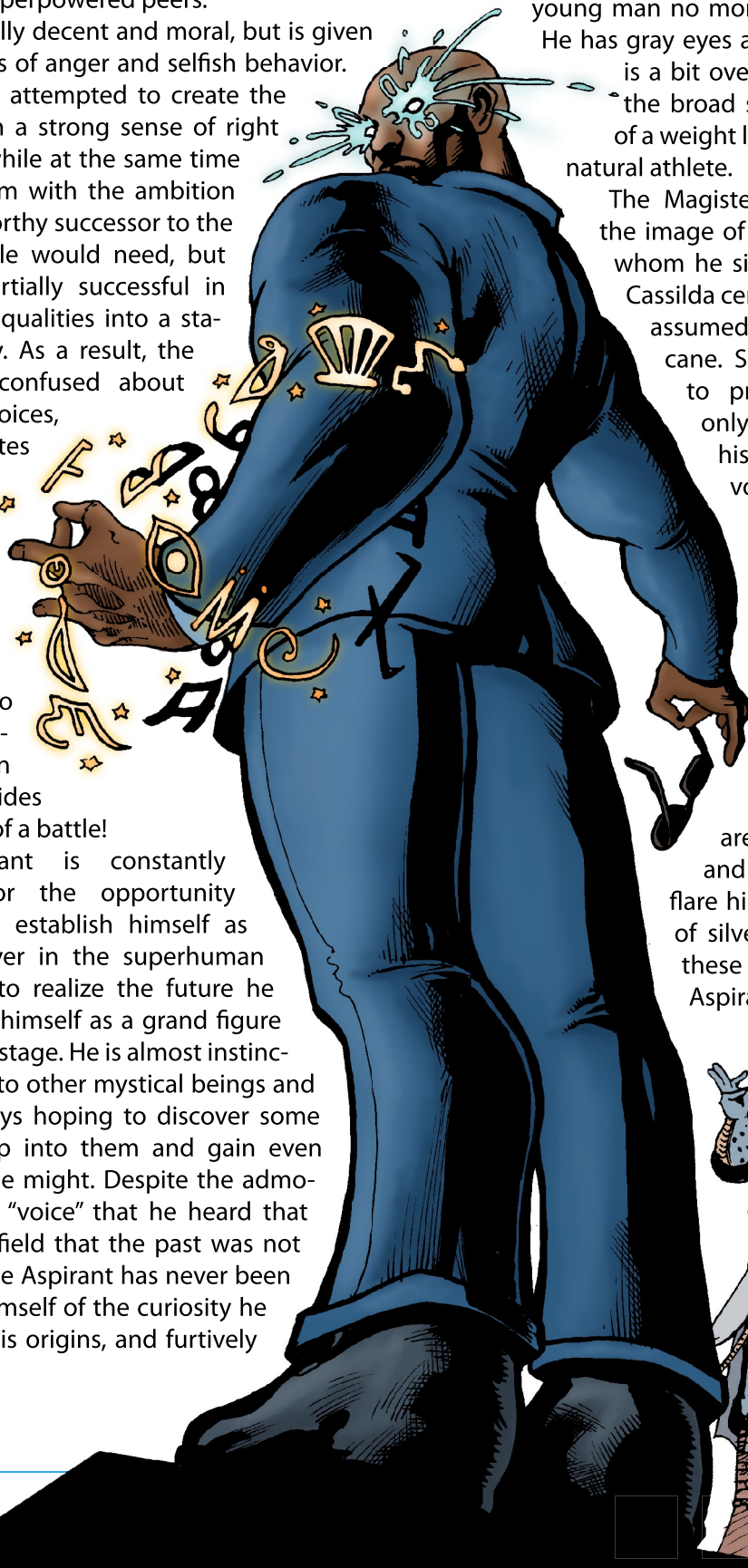
APPEARANCE

The Aspirant appears to be a good-looking young man no more than thirty years of age.

He has gray eyes and coffee-colored skin. He is a bit over six feet in height. He has the broad shoulders and barrel chest of a weight lifter and the easy grace of a natural athlete.

The Magister created the Aspirant in the image of his firstborn son Absalom, whom he sired with his one true love Cassilda centuries ago, years before he assumed the role of Archadept Arcane. Sadly, Absalom succumbed to pneumonia when he was only twelve years old, while his father was away on a sea voyage. The Magister also designed the Aspirant with some noticeably non-human attributes to further separate him from the "common people" around him. The Aspirant has no body hair, his resting pulse rate (45 beats per minute) and body temperature (78° Fahrenheit)

are well below human norms, and whenever his emotions flare his eyes smolder with sparks of silver-white flame. Because of these physical differences, the Aspirant wears bulky clothes and mirrored sunglasses when in his "Malcolm Magnus" identity. As the Aspirant, he makes no effort to conceal the fire that flashes in his eyes, depending upon its brilliance



THE ASPIRANT

PL 12

STR	+4	18	INT	+7	24
DEX	+4	18	WIS	+4	18
CON	+6	22	CHA	+4	18
TOUGHNESS	+10/+6*		FORTITUDE	+9	
			REFLEX	+7	
			WILL	+10	

*flat-footed

SKILLS

Bluff 4 (+8), Diplomacy 8 (+12), Disguise 2 (+6), Gather Information 2 (+6), Intimidate 4 (+8), Investigate 2 (+9), Knowledge (arcane lore) 8 (+15), Knowledge (streetwise) 2 (+9), Notice 8 (+12), Sense Motive 4 (+8), Stealth 4 (+8)

FEATS

Defensive Roll 4, Diehard, Eidetic Memory, Endurance, Improved Initiative, Precise Shot, Trance

POWERS

Immunity 10 (life support, aging), **Super-Movement 2** (Air-Walking), **Super-Senses 7** (Magical Awareness [Acute, Extended 3, Radius, Ranged]), **Cold Fire** (dynamic array): **Blast 12**; **Create Objects 11** (cold fire constructs; *Power Feats*: Precise, Stationary); **Healing 12**; **Strike 8** (cold fire weapon; *Power Feats*: Mighty; *Extras*: Penetrating)

COMBAT

Attack +12, Grapple +16, Damage +4 (unarmed), +12 (blast), +12 (strike), Defense +8, +4 (flat-footed), Knockback -5, Initiative +8

TOTALS

Abilities 58 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 6 + Powers 51 + Combat 32 + Saves 20 = 178 PP

to disguise his facial features. He usually eschews a costume in favor of more utilitarian clothing; a tight-fitting black shirt and pants, with sturdy boots. Lately, he's been developing a taste for robes and cloaks, and has on occasion donned some of the artifacts he's pilfered over the last couple of years. When he uses his powers, fiery mystic sigils appear about his fingertips.

POWERS AND TACTICS

As stated above, the Aspirant commands a form of mystic energy known as the "The Living Flame", or "The Cold-Fire". It is an energy he can mentally shape into solid forms, creating nearly any object he can imagine, from battering rams to swords to walls. The Aspirant actually travels about by forming a bridge of cold-flame beneath him. The cold-flame can both disrupt and repair living tissue, allowing the Aspirant to wield it as a weapon or employ it as a tool of healing.

In addition to wielding mystical fire, the Aspirant possesses slightly superhuman physical abilities – his strength, reflexes, and resistance to harm have all been enhanced beyond mortal limits. He also has the innate power to detect sources of magic, even living creatures endowed with mystical might. This is beyond his control; he is almost instinctively drawn to concentrations of arcane power anywhere within a ten-mile radius. His remaining senses, though quite keen, fall within the normal human ranges. As a magical construct, the Aspirant is invulnerable to many forms of injury. He does not age, he is immune to cold, disease, and poison, and while blows, bullets, and the like can hurt him, such wounds impair him much less than they would a normal man. He does need breathable air, food, water, and rest, but long-term deprivation will merely cause his artificial body will enter an inert, comatose state, which he will awaken from as soon as livable conditions are restored.

IN GAME

The Aspirant can serve as a mysterious figure that alternately aids and opposes the heroes. His lust for esoteric secrets and arcane items can involve him in any adventure that has a mystical bent. While his desire to "be somebody" can motivate him to take part in the sort of world-threatening conflicts that superheroes often finds themselves embroiled in.

It is highly unlikely that the Aspirant will be found working as a henchman or in league with a group of villains, unless he's been duped or tempted with the promise of some powerful magical device. He could most often serve as a "spoiler"—a morally confused interloper with strange personal motivations. Ideas for adventures involving the Aspirant follow:

Change of Heart: A brilliant but crazed occultist, intent on exacting vengeance against all his real and imagined enemies, crafts a golem and sets it loose to wreak havoc on the heroes' city. When the PCs respond to the threat they discover this in no common

construct they face; this golem is empowered by the Cosmic Heart, a mystic gemstone set deep in the arcane android's chest. The Cosmic Heart acts like a mystic battery, soaking up magical energies from the very fabric of reality. The golem can use these energies to manifest an almost limitless number of super-powers, but lacking much imagination, the construct simply emulates the abilities of those around it, adapting to whatever opponents it is faced with (use the Ultimate Mimic archetype from M&M, page 224, using a Mimic rank of X if necessary).

While the heroes fight valiantly to put an end to the creature's rampage, they simply seem overmatched by the thing's naked might. But just as the struggle seems to be turning against them, two new figures arrive to battle alongside the heroes: The Aspirant and Radian, both of who heard the reports about a monster tearing up the downtown area. The combined might of the city's defenders proves just enough to bring the creature down.

But as soon as the golem falls, the power-hungry side of the Aspirant's nature takes hold and he uses his powers to tear the Cosmic Heart from the now inanimate creature's chest, desperate to possess the vast energies contained within. Once it is in his grasp, the Aspirant is able to instinctively tap into the gemstone to increase his superhuman abilities. He then turns his newly enhanced abilities against Radian. Taking the hero by surprise, he quickly wrests away Radian's enchanted lantern and claims the artifact for his own, making him even more formidable. He then exults in his moment of ultimate triumph, proclaiming that his greatness is finally at hand and bursting into maniacal laughter. He appears to be literally drunk with power.

While the Aspirant isn't about to set out on a campaign of terror, the heroes can hardly stand back to allow someone as unstable as the Aspirant access to so much raw power. Even if he shifts back into his heroic persona, it will only be a matter of time before he uses the Cosmic Heart and the Lantern to do something criminal or foolish. The PCs will have to wrest the mystic artifacts from the Aspirant before he can do any serious damage to himself or others.

Meet the Parents: After yet another of his many failed attempts to achieve greatness, the Aspirant has mulled matters over and decided that perhaps he has to finally find out the truth behind his past before he can move forward. Maybe his lack of knowledge about his origins has been holding him back from fulfilling his potential. He decides to get serious about uncovering his origins, starting with tracking down his parents. Not comfortable with the idea of

engaging the services of a private investigator, he decides to find the answers he's looking for himself.

Working from the few clues he has available (his apparent age and racial make-up, the part of the country he first remembers appearing in, the nature of his powers) the Aspirant began his investigation. After several months of research, he finally came across what he was looking for – a thirty year old mystery that seems to explain everything. Three decades ago the infant son of two midwestern superheroes was kidnapped, and despite a multi-state police and FBI dragnet, the child was never found. No suspect was ever identified in the kidnapping; none of the few supervillains the pair had clashed with were ever implicated in the crime. The two heroes had no real archenemies to speak of, as most of the villains they had fought were strictly small time. The parents were Trey "Crossfire" Masters, a pyrokinetic black mutant, and Alicia "Princess Paragon" Littlejohn, a white heroine who derived super-strength and invulnerability from the Paragon Stone, a mystic gem. Sadly, the couple proved unable to cope with this tragedy, and their marriage ended a few years later. Ten years later, Crossfire was badly injured in a battle with Cauldron, a minor league superhero. The shape-shifting criminal known as Imposter had framed Cauldron for a string of robberies, and Crossfire tried to bring him in. In the resulting fight, Crossfire sustained serious brain damage, and has languished in a coma ever since. Princess Paragon continued in the superhero game until the early 1980s, when her powers began failing (the Paragon Stone had only a finite reserve of energy). The Aspirant became convinced that he had identified his parents. Everything fit – the right racial background, plausible mix of powers, right age and geographic location, even an undoubtedly traumatic childhood that probably led to his amnesia and mood swings. It was a lock!

The heroes are alerted to all this when they are approached by a frightened Alicia Littlejohn; the now middle-aged ex-heroine explains that two weeks earlier the Aspirant showed up on her doorstep, insisting that he was her long-lost son. She tried to dissuade him, explaining that there was no way they could be sure of that until he took a DNA test, that his physical features and powers only superficially resembled those of either her or her former husband, and so forth. The truth of the matter, as she eventually admits, Ms. Littlejohn knows the Aspirant couldn't possibly be her son. The child she had was not fathered by the African American Crossfire, but by Adam Leonard, an assistant DA with whom she was having an affair. Her little boy was white, not

biracial. The couple kept this out of the press, but it was one of the factors in their later divorce. She considered simply telling the Aspirant this, but held back because he became so agitated when she tried to argue against him. She is aware of his reputation for irrational behavior. Alicia is now remarried and has two daughters living at home, twenty-year-old Lynn and fourteen-year-old Lauren, and is afraid of saying anything that might set off the Aspirant's temper. She instead told him she simply isn't interested in pursuing matters further, out of concern for her current family, and hoped that would be the end of things.

Unfortunately, the Aspirant has taken to stalking her. She has spotted him in her neighborhood several times, watching her from a distance then vanishing as soon as she noticed. Yesterday, she received a letter from him (no return address) stating that he was going to prove himself a good son by taking vengeance on Cauldron, the man who crippled his father, her ex-husband Crossfire. Guilt-stricken after what happened to Crossfire, the armored Cauldron, a.k.a. Luther Tompkins, retired as a superhero, trained as an occupational therapist, and spent years working to help other people who had been left disabled by violence. He's now in his sixties and semi-retired. He hasn't put on the powered armor that he wore in his heroic identity in years. Alicia has his address – Luther has written to her many times over the years, begging her forgiveness for what he did to Crossfire, offering her advice on which hospitals and treatments might offer hope. Though she has never been able to truly forgive him for what he did, she doesn't want to see him hurt or killed, especially not because of a lie she has been living with for so long. She's prepared to tell Aspirant the truth, but fears his reaction. She begs the heroes to accompany her in intercepting the Aspirant before he can reach Cauldron. As she expects that the situation may turn violent she wears her old Paragon Stone necklace under her clothing, though she does not dress in costume.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that the Aspirant visited his supposed father Crossfire in the nursing home where the man has been cared for the last fifteen years, promising the older man that he would make everything right. He tried using the Cold-Fire to heal Crossfire's injuries, but seemingly failed. He left more determined than ever to avenge himself on Cauldron. Unbeknownst to the Aspirant, Crossfire came out of his catatonic state shortly after his visit. Somehow the Aspirant's mystic flames had a delayed effect, reviving him and sparking his powers. Unfortunately, the newly awakened Crossfire is mentally unbalanced; he has no idea how much

time has elapsed since his battle with Cauldron and is intent on finishing what he began. He burned his way out of the hospital and made his way back to his old apartment building, salvaging one of his old costumes from a trunk hidden in the basement. He is literally hot on the Aspirant's trail, sensing this will lead him to his old foe. When he sees Alicia on the scene he will attack her too – in his current state he sees her as just someone else who betrayed and hurt him. Ironically, the Aspirant will try to prevent any harm from coming to Alicia Littlejohn, as he still thinks she is his mother. The PCs will have their hands full trying to calm the situation and preventing serious harm from coming to any of the people involved.

ENDGAME

The Aspirant's ultimate fate will probably be more in the hands of the Magister than in those of the Aspirant. If the Aspirant is able to distinguish himself and develop a balanced and humane personality, the Magister will consider him as a candidate to assume the role of Archadept Arcane. If the Aspirant continues on his path of unpredictable behavior and situational ethics, then the Magister may consider terminating his creation's existence. Whatever the case, by the time the decision is made, the Aspirant may have mastered enough of his abilities and accrued enough magical artifacts that he may be able to usurp the role of Archadept Arcane, a role he is instinctively drawn to. And should the Magister move to destroy his creation he may find the instincts he instilled in him, the unconscious desire to amass magical power, may have transformed the Aspirant into a fitting opponent for his creator.

CARMODY THE REBEL

Sorcerers and mad seers on a thousand worlds whisper tales of the Vrane, that proud race of warriors whose legions once strode victoriously across many planes of existence.

The Vrane owed their invincibility to the near limitless vitality of their home plane of Koth, which all Vrane could draw upon for high-limitless strength and endurance. Koth was home to the paradeity known as Vraboath, the Wellspring of Worlds. Vraboath—a vast cauldron of roiling, fecund life energies—had birthed several sub-planes and nascent universes. The Vrane venerated Vraboath as their source of strength and dedicated their conquests to the Wellspring of Worlds, though Vraboath gave no acknowledgement to its followers; perhaps, such an entity could not even perceive their existence. Overlords of a vast

dimensional empire, the Vrane drew wealth and power from the myriad civilizations they reduced to fiefdoms and the entire species they ruthlessly enslaved.

Even those who knew the source of the Vrane’s power could not defeat them. To destroy the Vrane’s connection to Vraboath would have destroyed Koth itself, releasing the Wellspring’s energies into the greater multiverse and unleashing an explosion of furious, unchecked evolution that would throw countless worlds into chaos. Ultimately, however, the majesty of the Vrane Empire was ended when the race came up against the human sorcerer known as the Magister, Earth’s Archadept Arcane.

Despite his might and skill, the Magister proved as impotent in the face of such power as any other opponent of the Vrane, until he hit upon the strategy of poisoning that power at the source. He placed a mystical corruption within the Wellspring of Worlds, a taint designed to spread throughout the Vrane race each time a warrior called on the power of Vraboath.

It worked only too well. Before they could complete their invasion, waves of apathy, hedonism, and self-indulgence overtook nearly all of the Vrane. Their warriors grew fat and soft, their conquered races revolted, and the empire collapsed amid the righteous fury of billions of slaves. So piteously was the civilization brought low that the Magister himself, seeing the devastation his actions had wrought, was moved by their plight. He took the Vrane as his charges, protecting them from the vengeance of their former subjects and doing his best to rehabilitate their violent culture.

Carmody is one of the few Vrane who was spared the effects of the corrupted Wellspring. His mother was Ornellia the Forsaken, member of a small sect that did not worship the power of Vraboath but instead venerated ancestral spirits. Ornellia raised Carmody in religious exile on the winter-world of Frimbule-Yon, and taught him the Vrane virtues of ambition, courage, and stoicism along with the rites and rituals of her faith. He grew up strong in both mind and body, toughened by the fierce wilderness of

Frimbule-Yon, but the grueling world took its toll on Ornellia. She died suffering, and on the day of her death Carmody swore an oath to avenge her by destroying the hated enemy who had brought the Vrane to such dire straits: the Magister.

After the loss of his mother, Carmody wandered far across the plane of Frimbule-Yon, and despite (or perhaps, because of) his race’s infamy, he made a fortune as a sell-sword, fighting in the endless wars that plagued the wintry realm in the years following the Fall of the Vrane. He was in great demand not only for his prowess but his charismatic leadership and strategic acumen.

A chance encounter with an elderly Vrane sorcerer gave Carmody the opportunity he had been looking for—to leave Frimbule-Yon behind and make his way to the Vrane homeworld of Koth. The older Vrane had been a member of the Order of Planar Magi, an occult fraternity whose members had used magic to transport high-ranking Vrane military officials between dimensions during their inspection tours and multi-dimensional wars. The mage trained young Carmody in the ways of sorcery and gave him many enchanted talismans and other trinkets to aid him. Eventually, Carmody completed his training, and he immediately left the frozen world to which his mother had been exiled. His new skills allowed him to open the portals to Koth, which the Vrane had closed in their retreat from Frimbule-Yon.

Shortly after appearing on Koth, Carmody began an evangelical crusade, attempting to rouse the Vrane from their stupor and lead them back to greatness. He was dubbed Carmody the Rebel and gathered a small but intensely loyal following, mostly young warriors who had never been initiated into the mysteries of Vraboath. The speed of Carmody’s rise was matched only by his sudden fall, as agents of the Magister quickly got wind of the rebellion and crushed it utterly.

His followers were arrested, the temple he had established was destroyed, and Carmody was forced to flee under the threat of execution. Rather than returning to Frimbule-Yon, however, Carmody stormed the gates of the High Hall,

VITAL STATS: CARMODY THE REBEL 

Quote: "I WILL NEVER REST UNTIL I HAVE FULFILLED MY BLOOD-OATH AND SLAIN THE ENEMY OF MY PEOPLE."

Real Name: Carmody

Aliases: None

Occupation: Rebel leader

Legal Status: None

Identity: Public

Marital Status: Single

Known Relatives: Ornellia (mother, deceased)

Affiliation: None

Base of Operations: Mobile

Height: 5'2"

Weight: 260 lbs.

Hair: Blond

Eyes: Gray

Distinguishing Marks: Cobalt-blue skin, metallic gray eyes

the seat of the puppet regime the Magister had left in his stead to rehabilitate the Vrane. Fighting his way to the inner chambers of the Regent, the Magister's proxy ruler, he found another portal, this one leading to the Magister's homeworld of Earth. He entered without hesitation, relishing the thought of bringing this war directly to the hated sorcerer's doorstep.

At this point, destiny took a strange turn. On Earth, an inner-city gang of neo-Nazis called the Disciples of Völund had begun mixing Odinist rituals with their white supremacist rhetoric. Using a book of spells written by members of Germany's Thule society, they accidentally completed a ritual that called out to one of the petty magical talismans Carmody carried, interfering with the portal's magic and causing the plane-tossed Vrane to appear before them.

The awed neo-pagan gang members began to worship the Carmody, and he used their veneration to make himself the gang's leader. He stripped the Disciples of their backwards white supremacist beliefs and made them a force to be reckoned with in their neighborhood, which was one of the poorest and toughest parts of the city. He encouraged their nature worship and other elements of their neopaganism, which bore some resemblance to his own religion. The Disciples now accept members of any race, so long as they embrace

the Carmody's new belief system. They are no longer called the Disciples of Völund, but merely the Disciples; though their name does not reflect it, everyone knows exactly whose disciples they have become.

The combination of Carmody's discipline, martial skills and sorcerous knowledge allowed the Disciples to drive out the pushers, pimps, and other undesirable elements from their neighborhoods and effectively take control of several city blocks.

The police, whose visits to this dangerous area were always irregular and sporadic, now barely patrol the Disciples' turf at all, and usually turn a blind eye to the

gang's criminal enterprises.

Carmody now walks openly in his territory, displaying his blue skin and grey eyes for everyone to see. In a world where superhumans and costumed adventurers openly exist, Carmody's existence is accepted, though no one knows he is from another world. The locals see him as their very own super-heroic Robin Hood, and many urban myths purport to tell Carmody's "secret origin." Grateful for the increased safety of their neighborhoods, residents are generally protective of Carmody and his Disciples, though a few are beginning to chafe at the rather iron-fisted manner in which Carmody rules his "feudom" in the inner city.

Carmody has taken a human woman named Anita Vasquez, a single mother whose younger brother is a Disciple, as his "consort." While Carmody tells himself that his relationship with Anita is only a matter of convenience, the reality is that his feelings for her are genuine and go beyond mere lust or possessiveness.

Carmody sees reflections of his mother's bravery and strength of character in Anita, and would sooner die than see her come to harm.



butch!

The Magister is in fact wholly aware of Carmody's activities and presence on Earth and even partially orchestrated his introduction to Anita. He believes the idealistic warrior might actually be a good candidate to eventually assume the office of Archadept Arcane—unless the young rebel forces the Magister to slay him first...

PERSONALITY

Carmody has sworn to slay the Magister or perish in the attempt. His hatred for the Archadept Arcane is exceeded only by his shame over the lowly state to which his people have fallen. He believes that if he succeeds in his mission, there may be hope for his race. He hopes the Vrane will be so inspired by his triumph that they'll find the will to break free from the effects of the Magister's curse and take up arms as valiant conquerors once more.

Carmody adheres to the Vrane code of honor, which prohibits lying, stealing (booty taken as a result of conquest is not considered stealing), oath-breaking, or committing acts of torture. Carmody has no compunctions about attacking by surprise, taking advantage of an opponent's weakness, or killing enemies who have already been defeated, though he will accept a foe's honorable surrender. He has all the instincts of a seasoned military leader and will use any means at his disposal, whether magical or mundane, to secure victory. He exhibits all the customary arrogance of his species, holding himself superior to humans and other sentient races.

Carmody sees the humans of his neighborhood as subjects of his dominion and therefore entitled to his protection from outside threats. Also, he does sometimes develop a grudging respect for human beings that distinguish themselves through bravery and valor in battle, considering them something like honorary Vrane. Such valiant humans are worthy of being considered allies or respected enemies, but no human could ever be truly equal to Carmody and his kin.

APPEARANCE

Carmody the Rebel is squat and stocky, his physique blocky and muscular, and in this he resembles the old warriors of the Vrane. Like all his people, he has cobalt-blue skin, and metallic gray eyes. His long, golden-blond hair is tied back in a ponytail, a hairstyle traditional to his religious sect. Despite his alien features and short stature, Carmody's appearance is still human enough to be considered ruggedly good-looking. Since coming to Earth, Carmody usually

CARMODY THE REBEL

PL 10

STR

+5

20

INT

+0

10

DEX

+4

18

WIS

+1

12

CON

+5

20

CHA

+4

18

TOUGHNESS

+10/+5*

FORTITUDE

+7

REFLEX

+7

WILL

+7

*without armor

SKILLS

Acrobatics 8 (+12), Bluff 4 (+8), Craft (artistic) 2 (+2), Diplomacy 2 (+6), Intimidate 6 (+10), Knowledge (arcane lore) 10 (+10), Notice 6 (+7), Stealth 4 (+8), Survival 2 (+3)

FEATS

Ambidexterity, Artificer, Attack Focus (melee) 2, Dodge Focus 2, Elusive Target, Improved Initiative, Inspire, Minions 5 (ten 30 PP minions), Move-by Action, Power Attack, Takedown Attack

POWERS

Device 2 (easy to lose; "Magic Weapons"), **Device 2** (hard to lose; "Vrane Armor"), **Immunity 2** (disease, cold), **Leaping 2**, **Magic 7**, *Vrane Spirit-Channeling* (array): **Boost 10** (ability scores; *Flaws*: Personal); **Blast 5** (sonic; *Extras*: Area – Cone, Penetrating); **Emotion Control 10** (*Extras*: Area – Burst, Aura, Selective Attack; *Flaws*: Fear only, Touch – Range); **Regeneration 20** (Bruised 3, Unconscious 3, Injured 4, Staggered 4, Disabled 6)

DEVICES

Magic Weapons (array): Heart-Biter: **Strike 6** (*Power Feats*: Mighty); Spell-Splitter: **Strike 4** (*Power Feats*: Mighty; *Extras*: Penetrating); *Vrane Armor*: **Protection 5** (*Extras*: Impervious)

COMBAT

Attack +7, +9 (melee), Grapple +12, Damage +5 (unarmed), +11 (Heart-Biter), +9 (Spell-Splitter), +5 (blast), Defense +10, +4 (flat-footed), Knockback –7, Initiative +8

DRAWBACKS

Power Loss (must gesture or speak to use magic; Uncommon), Vulnerable (to fire/heat; Uncommon, Minor)

TOTALS

Abilities 38 + Skills 11 (44 ranks) + Feats 17 + Powers 55 + Combat 30 + Saves 10 - Drawbacks 2 = 160 PP

Carmody's background and the background of the Vrane could be woven more directly into your campaign by making the proposed Vrane invasion of Earth an in-game reality. This invasion could even serve as a suitable beginning for a new campaign and a means of drawing your heroes together into a team. Interdimensional gates open all over the globe and disgorge legions of superpowered Vrane warriors. The heroes (and possibly villains) of the Earth engage in devastating battles in every major city in the world. After the PCs fight the first of these battles and are regrouping and healing their wounds, the Magister appears to them. Using powerful precognitive magicks, the Archadept Arcane shows the assembled heroes the inevitable result of the Vrane invasion—a world enslaved, humanity toiling to serve the Earth's new masters, and in the background vast graveyards dedicated to the Vrane's honored enemies, with a few gravestones bearing some familiar names... The Magister has a desperate plan: he knows the source of the Vrane's exceptional powers and believes it represents their only weakness. He will transport a small group of heroes to the Vrane's home dimension of Koth where they will steal into the massive underground temple that houses the entity known as Vraboath, Wellspring of Worlds. The heroes will have to afford the Magister enough time to work the lengthy ritual that will poison the Wellspring. Meanwhile, the temple's guardians attack and one of the Vrane legions rushes back to their home dimension when they learn of the plan. If these elements are worked into your campaign then the PCs will also earn Carmody's enmity, making them nearly as hated in the young Vrane's eyes as the Magister himself.

dresses like an average denizen of his neighborhood, and is often attired in a tight-fitting t-shirt, jeans. When he knows he will be entering battle, he is adorned in the traditional fluted titanium armor of a Vrane warrior.

POWERS AND TACTICS

Carmody practices the mystic art of spirit channeling, taught to him by his mother. He usually calls upon the souls of his revered ancestors to enhance his strength, speed, and reflexes, but can perform a number of other astonishing feats, such as emitting a war cry capable of shattering stone, recovering quickly from deadly wounds, or surrounding himself with an aura of dread that unnerves his foes.

Carmody is a formidable hand-to-hand fighter, but is not quite as skilled as he believes. He relies as much on his natural agility and tenacity as he does any real talent for melee combat, wielding an axe in one hand and a sword in the other. The runes etched upon his weapons, Heart-Biter and Spell-Splitter, guide the sword straight to the hearts of his foes and the axe to cut through magical barriers. He is certain that when he finally confronts the Magister in combat, he will have no problem delivering a killing blow. Carmody has one physical weakness: the long years he spent in the chilling environment of Frimbule-Yon left him inured to cold but vulnerable to heat and flame. Carmody's blood runs cold, as does his thirst for vengeance.

IN GAME

Carmody's status as a gang leader makes him ideal

for inclusion in a street-level campaign as a powerful antagonist. He can serve as an occasional ally against the more dangerous criminal elements in the city, but can just as easily be contentious and belligerent if the heroes enter his little "fiefdom" unbidden.

In many superhero campaigns, Carmody's presence in the campaign city may be tolerated, since he has done some good in his adopted neighborhood. He has rid the Disciples of their neo-Nazi tendencies and helped rehabilitate some of the neighborhood's worst drug addicts. The heroes may simply see him as one of the city's more colorful figures, giving him little thought outside of their occasional encounters with him. That will of course change if any of Carmody's plans come to fruition, or if he comes into direct conflict with the Magister. A few more specific ideas for incorporating Carmody into your game are detailed below:

Gang Warfare: An organized crime syndicate decides to move in on the neighborhoods held by the Disciples. Underestimating their opposition, they are pushed back hard by the street gang, losing several of their soldiers. Even worse, Carmody personally delivers a sound thrashing to the syndicate boss's son, leaving the young man permanently scarred. In retaliation, the crime lord hires a team of superhuman mercenaries to take down the Disciples and bring him Carmody's head. Carmody recruits a couple of street-level supervillains in turn, and the gang war is joined.

The mayhem escalates, the body count rises, and the public clamors for the city government to bring

the situation under control. When conventional law enforcement proves unable to do so, the mayor appeals to the PCs. Will they treat both sides like the criminals they are, or will they aid Carmody in defending the neighborhood? Will they intervene directly, or attempt to negotiate with the two sides and avoid further bloodshed? Whatever their choices, Carmody's interactions with the PCs will be less dependent on which side that they choose than how "honorably" they conduct themselves.

The Test: To test the young Vrane's abilities, the Magister has used unwitting agents to spread a rumor through the occult underground that one of Carmody's weak magical trinkets is in fact a legendary mystical amulet that gives the wearer the ability of dimensional travel. The Crimson Covenant, a group of evil mystics, has many members who covet such a magical artifact. The Covenant's members undertake a simple plan to gain the amulet. First, they give magical talismans to a voodoo-oriented rival gang of the Disciples and prompt a feud between the two gangs. This gang attacks Carmody and his Disciples, and though they are quickly defeated due to Carmody's inhuman power and magical prowess, the incident triggers a series of brutal reprisals. Amid the violence, one of the most powerful Covenant sorcerers, Maxwell Mardrake, sends his servant, the infamous underworld harrier known as the Huntsman (see *Sons of the Gun*, page 19), to recover the artifact. When an informant reveals the true reason for all the violence, will the heroes attempt to stop the Huntsman, help Carmody, or will they discover Carmody does not possess the coveted artifact and persuade the Covenant to stop its attack?

The Lady or the Prize: An occult adept kidnaps the loved ones of one or more of the PCs. The madman does something terrible yet reversible to his victims, perhaps aging them to senescence, banishing them to a forlorn dimension like Frimbule-Yon, or turning them to stone. His messages promise the heroes he will restore the victims to normal, so long as they cooperate. He wants the heroes to retrieve a tome of mystic knowledge from the lair of a legendary villain. While the villain has not been seen in years, he left several animated guardians, traps, and wards to protect the tome. Retrieving it from the lair will be no small feat. As the sinister magician has no wish to risk his own skin, he has selected the heroes for the task.

Accompanying the PCs will be Carmody, who was chosen by the sorcerer for his unique blend of magical and martial skills. Since Carmody's girlfriend Anita is among those kidnapped, he will do his utmost to

ORIGIN-IN-A-BOX

— □ x

You are a peaceful Vrane who always detested the war-like nature of your people. You have gone out into the cosmos to do what good you can, in order to repay the debt of oppression and war that your people owe. You hope to serve as an example of the great good that the Vrane race could do in the multiverse. You have settled in one of the dimensions that the Vrane never got around to conquering, the home dimension of the being that ultimately brought a stop to the Vrane's war-like ways, the Magister. This dimension is a troubled one, but has a small population of superpowered individuals that will make your presence there not too alarming.

This origin can make for a simple way to tie a character into the greater working of the multiverse. The character can be created with some knowledge of dimensional travel or he or she may know little beyond the core of the former Vrane Empire. Whatever the case, the hero's unique nature may attract the attention of various mystical factions on Earth or may raise the ire of the denizens of dimensions that were once under the yoke of the Vrane. This can provide ample opportunity to pit the character against forces seeking to exploit or harm the character, all the while the hero seeks to redeem the reputation of his kind in the eyes of the cosmos.

Vrane, Template

Abilities: Strength +8, Dexterity +6, Constitution +8

Feats: Dodge Focus 2, Elusive Target, Improved Initiative, Power Attack

Powers: **Leaping 2**, *Vrane Spirit-Channeling* (array); **Boost 10** (ability scores; *Flaws:* Personal); **Blast 5** (sonic; *Extras:* Area – Cone, Penetrating); **Emotion Control 10** (*Extras:* Area – Burst, Aura, Selective Attack; *Flaws:* Fear only, Touch – Range); **Regeneration 20** (Bruised 3, Unconscious 3, Injured 4, Staggered 4, Disabled 6)

Cost: 52 PP

see the mission through to a successful conclusion. But when the party reaches its objective, he realizes that the secrets contained in the book could be invaluable in bringing down the Magister. Suddenly he must weigh his quest to destroy his enemy against the life of the woman he cares for. Will he betray the heroes and attempt to abscond with the tome for his own purposes? Or has he come to value love over vengeance?

ENDGAME

Sooner or later, Carmody and the Magister seem destined to meet in battle. The entire point of the alien's presence on Earth is to destroy the Archdeft Arcane. After that, his plan is to somehow free Koth from the corruption of Vraboath and lead his people into a glorious new age.

But when Anita becomes pregnant with Carmody's child, suddenly his loyalties are divided. Is he loyal to the world that rejected him and his mother for being different, or the world that has made him a leader of men and given him a family? While Carmody is unlikely to abandon his quest for vengeance on the Magister, the idea of raising a child on the apathetic, accursed world of Koth is not so palatable. The fact that a Vrane can sire a child with an Earth woman means that humans are not so different or inferior as he thought—just culturally primitive and in need of guidance. Carmody may delay his vengeance until after his child is born, perhaps even putting it off for years to prevent reprisals against his new family. Or he might choose to try and destroy the Magister soon, but then remain on Earth with Anita and their child, helping his subjects to transform their own world, one block at a time.

COLD COMFORT

Maureen "Mo" Dickinson was born forty-seven years ago in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She has been waging a personal war against the supernatural for the past twenty-two years. Mo's hatred for all things magic really began when she was twelve. By that time a drunk driver had already killed her father and her mother had lost one of her arms in an industrial accident. Her mother, Nelly, her younger sisters, and she lived a hardscrabble, hand-to-mouth life in a run-down Kentucky trailer park. Bad luck seemed to dog them no matter what

they attempted and her mother, who had taken to drinking, sometimes spoke of a curse on the family.

Nelly attributed the family curse to her great grandfather, who had cheated a man named Southern Greeley out of his life's savings in a card game. Greeley had supposedly laid a curse upon her great-grandfather down to the sixth generation. If this was true, the curse would already have been passed down to Nelly and her daughters, and would be passed on in turn to any children her daughters bore as well. It was hard not to believe that the curse was genuine. In just one year, Nelly was badly beaten by a drunk at the bar where she worked part-time, her six-year-old daughter Norma was bitten on the face by another trailer park resident's pit bull, scarring the girl, and nine-year-old Donna-Jean was struck by a car, breaking the girl's leg in three places. They were cut off from food stamps for three months when their caseworker lost their files. Someone broke into their trailer home a few days before Christmas and stole the girls' meager presents. Only twelve-year-old Mo seemed to get through without anything especially bad happening. Mo was a special girl, tough and resilient, resourceful beyond her years. She always

found a way to make the best of a situation, and she shouldered much of the responsibility of caring for her younger siblings.

One day a special visitor came into their drab lives – a man named Mr. Alabaster. The man showed up at the door of their trailer one summer day and told them he has sensed their "special need" for his services; he claimed to be a traveling mystic, one of an order that went about helping those suffering unjustly from curses, apparitions, haunts, and the like. He knew their lives were being made miserable by such a curse. Mr. Alabaster made a few minor demonstrations of his power to prove what he told them was true. Mo's mother accepted the man into their meager home, and told him all she knew

VITAL STATS: COLD COMFORT

Quote: "IT'S LITTLE MORE'N COLD COMFORT PUTTIN' AN END TO A FILTHY SHADOW-THING LIKE YOU. BUT I AIN'T PARTICULAR, I'LL TAKE WHAT COMFORT I CAN GIT."

Real Name: Maureen "Mo" Dickinson

Aliases: Mary Dixon, Molly Dixon, Molly Dee.

Occupation: Monster-Hunter. Various occupations in past including bouncer, martial arts instructor, and gangland enforcer/leg-breaker.

Legal Status: American citizen with criminal record. Not currently wanted by police.

Identity: Secret

Marital Status: Single

Known Relatives: Nelly (mother, deceased), Norma (sister, deceased), Donna-Jean (sister, deceased), Tanya Culp (maiden name Dickinson, older sister by father's previous marriage), one nephew and two nieces. No known contact in last fifteen years.

Affiliation: None

Base of Operations: Mobile

Age: 47

Eye Color: Pale Blue

Hair Color: Grey with blond streaks.

Height: 6'0"

Weight: 170 lbs.

Distinguishing Marks: Missing two fingers, walks with a limp

of Greeley and the curse the wronged man had lain upon the Dickinson bloodline.

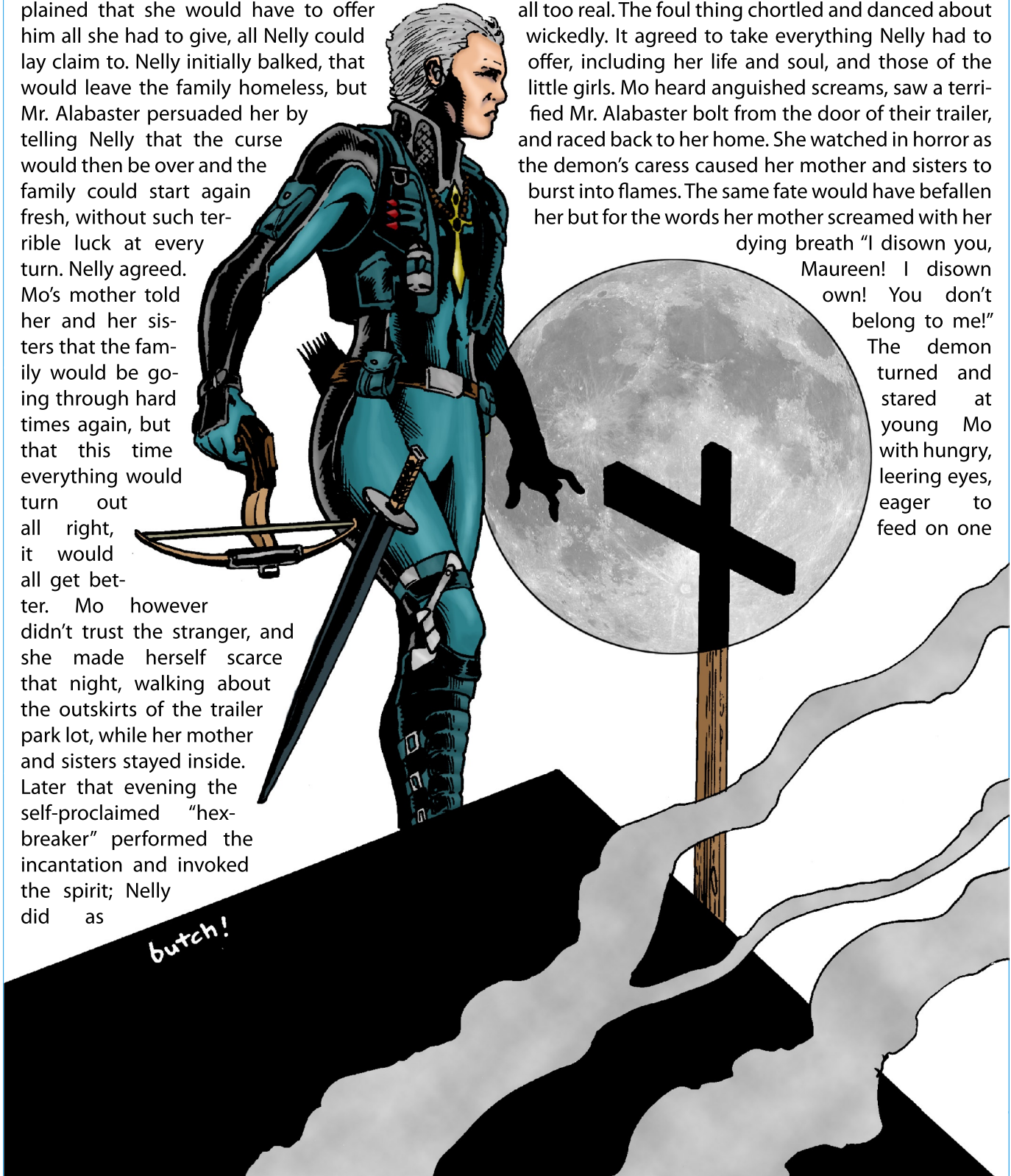
Mr. Alabaster took this all in stride, assuring the family that this was a minor task for one such as him, so long as her mother was willing to pay the necessary price. He would summon Greeley's spirit to Earth, force him to become corporeal, and then Maureen's mother would offer to repay the man for her great grandfather's wrongdoing. Mr. Alabaster explained that she would have to offer him all she had to give, all Nelly could lay claim to. Nelly initially balked, that would leave the family homeless, but Mr. Alabaster persuaded her by telling Nelly that the curse would then be over and the family could start again fresh, without such terrible luck at every turn. Nelly agreed. Mo's mother told her and her sisters that the family would be going through hard times again, but that this time everything would turn out all right, it would all get better. Mo however didn't trust the stranger, and she made herself scarce that night, walking about the outskirts of the trailer park lot, while her mother and sisters stayed inside. Later that evening the self-proclaimed "hex-breaker" performed the incantation and invoked the spirit; Nelly did as

she was told and offered everything she had to give. This would prove a horrible mistake.

The spirit summoned was not that of Southern Greeley – it was that of a Misery Demon, a creature that had been feeding off the misery of the trailer park, spreading ill fortune and sickness among the beleaguered residents. Mr. Alabaster had gotten everything wrong. The family legend of Southern Greeley had been just that, a legend. The demon was all too real. The foul thing chortled and danced about wickedly. It agreed to take everything Nelly had to offer, including her life and soul, and those of the little girls. Mo heard anguished screams, saw a terrified Mr. Alabaster bolt from the door of their trailer, and raced back to her home. She watched in horror as the demon's caress caused her mother and sisters to burst into flames. The same fate would have befallen her but for the words her mother screamed with her

dying breath "I disown you, Maureen! I disown you! You don't belong to me!"

The demon turned and stared at young Mo with hungry, leering eyes, eager to feed on one



COLD COMFORT

PL 10

STR	+4	18	INT	+2	14
DEX	+4	18	WIS	+2	14
CON	+4	18	CHA	+1	12
TOUGHNESS	+8/+4*		FORTITUDE	+8	
			REFLEX	+6	
			WILL	+5	

*without vest

SKILLS

Acrobatics 4 (+8), Bluff 6 (+11), Climb 4 (+6), Craft (mechanical) 4 (+5), Diplomacy 2 (+3), Disable Device 4 (+6), Disguise 4 (+6), Drive 1 (+5), Gather Information 8 (+9), Intimidate 6 (+7), Investigate 4 (+6), Knowledge (arcane lore) 8 (+10), Knowledge (physical sciences) 4 (+6), Language 6 (Native English, Crow, German, French, Latin, Spanish, Portuguese), Medicine 3 (+5), Notice 8 (+10), Search 6 (+8), Sense Motive 8 (+10), Stealth 8 (+12), Survival 4 (+6), Swim 2 (+4)

FEATS

Defensive Attack, Diehard, Dodge Focus 4, Elusive Target, Endurance, Equipment 3, Fearless, Improved Aim, Improved Block, Improved Initiative, Master Plan, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Quick Draw, Sneak Attack, Well-Informed.

POWERS

Device 2 (easy to lose; *Judgment*: **Strike 3** [*Power Feats*: Accurate, Mighty; *Extras*: Penetrating]), **Nemesis 5** (*Flaws*: Usable on Occult Enemies Only), **Mind Shield 2**

EQUIPMENT

Crossbow Gun (+3, 19-20, piercing, 40 ft., medium), Knives, Tactical Vest

DRAWBACKS

Disability (hard of hearing, limp, missing fingers and teeth, Uncommon, Minor)

COMBAT

Attack +11, +13 (*Judgment*), Grapple +15, Damage +4 (unarmed), Damage +7 (*Judgment*), Defense +12, +4 (flat-footed), Knockback -4, Initiative +8

TOTALS

Abilities 32 + Skills 26 (104 ranks) + Feats 21 + Powers 43 + Combat 30 + Saves 9 - Drawbacks 1 = 160 PP

that it no longer had a claim on the girl. With a howl of frustration, the demon vanished, leaving nothing but the stench of sulfur and three piles of ash and charred bones behind.

Little Maureen's childhood came to an end on that night. From that time forward she became consumed with hatred – hatred for the filthy beast that had claimed her mother and sisters, for the lying man who had claimed he could help them, even for the superstitious belief in the “family curse” that had ruined all their lives. She vowed to put an end to such things, to track down and destroy everything that was unnatural in the world, all the creatures of the occult and all those who trafficked in magic.

Maureen escaped from the institution where she was placed after her mother's death. She had spent eighteen months in the institution's rusty, mildewed gym, grimly building up her body. She then hitched her way to Lexington, the nearest big city. She learned to survive on the streets using her natural strength and size to become the leader of a girl-gang in the city's worst neighborhood. She led them on raids against local pushers and thieves, and saved every stolen dime while her “gang sisters” blew their shares on boys and good times. When Lexington got too hot, she took off again for another city further up north, and then another after that, always repeating the same pattern. She did anything she needed to do, both to survive and to get the money she knew she needed. Whenever she could, she took classes in martial arts, and bought (or stole) books on the occult. Her growing reputation soon made her an in demand bodyguard and underworld enforcer wherever she went. She did a lot of things she was not proud of, but she never took on a job that meant hurting innocent people. Maureen proved very capable in her role, despite her penchant for violence she was never arrested, let alone convicted of any crime. But she hated every minute that she spent working for criminals.

When she had enough money she began traveling the world, seeking out forgotten tribes in South America, ancient masters in hidden Asian monasteries, and hi-tech mercenaries in Africa. She was willing to pay or serve anyone who could train in the lethal arts. She sought out remote churches, forgotten libraries, and third world villages in the middle of nowhere. She learned everything she could about the shadow world, the habits of occult creatures, and mastered every skill she needed to carry out her self-appointed mission.

At twenty-five Maureen finally felt she was ready for her first mission. She tracked down Mr. Alabaster, the man responsible for calling forth the demon that had

more innocent soul, then the monster twisted its face and spat stinking ichors onto the floor, as it realized

burned her family alive that night. She found him in New Mexico, presiding over a minor mystic cabal. He now called himself Aloysius of the Order of the White Handed, claiming to represent some secret sect of witches. Maureen trailed the man back to a slightly run-down mansion on the outskirts of town where he now resided. She easily broke into the house, slipping past both the mystic wards and conventional security systems. Maureen stole into his bedroom, where the former Mr. Alabaster lay slumbering, a bottle of fine wine sitting empty on the floor, a crystal goblet beside it, and a magical tome sitting open upon the night stand next to the bed. She took the goblet from the floor and smashed it across the magician's face. The man awoke with a start, screaming in pain and spitting out blood. He attempted to rise, only to find Maureen's hand on his chest and a blade at his throat. "Remember me, sugar-pie? Remember my ma and sisters back in Kentucky? You made real mess outta things back then, huh? Well, killin' you is gonna be nothin' more'n cold comfort, but I guess it'll have to do." With that she drew her knife across the pathetic magician's throat. She stalked out of the room, the sounds of the sorcerer's gurgling death sweet music to her ears. Maureen gained a measure of vengeance for the death of her family that night, just enough to whet her appetite. She knew she would never rest so long as things like the demon that had claimed her mother and sisters walked the Earth. And men like Alabaster who would truck with the same kind of supernatural forces were just as bad. She had a lot of work ahead of her.

PERSONALITY

Maureen, now calling herself Cold Comfort, was born into a tough life and her existence has never gotten any easier. She is a rough, hard-edged woman and has little in the way of formal education or social graces, but she is by no means stupid. She may be "book dumb" but she is street smart. Maureen speaks with a distinct Mid-Southern rural accent. Her language is rough and crude, peppered with vulgarities, though she prefers action to words anyway. Cold Comfort has nothing but hate for everyone and everything supernatural and she makes no distinction between "good" and "evil" when it comes to the occult. In her eyes even those who use magic to help others are tainted, unclean, and evil. If she believes a magic-wielding individual can still be "saved", she will at first only seek to strip away the person's supernatural abilities – if that fails, she will show no further mercy. Despite the toll her private war against the occult has taken on her mind and body she is determined

to see it through to the bitter end. Cold Comfort is constantly on the move, traveling from city to city. She often makes her residence in trailer parks, tenement buildings, and other "low rent" districts that are unlikely to have much police oversight. She despises muggers, drug pushers, pimps and the like only slightly less than she does demons, ghouls, and other fiends. She's sent more than one piece of low life scum to the hospital or the morgue (Maureen never bothers to check which they end up in). Her survival methods have not changed, and she routinely steals from petty criminals and other lowlifes to finance her crusade. Her most fervent desire is to someday destroy the misery demon that took her family away, freeing their souls.

APPEARANCE

Cold Comfort is six feet tall, lithe yet muscular, with barely an ounce of body fat on her frame. She has handsome, angular features, and pale blue eyes. Her face is dominated by a prominent nose and strong jaw. Maureen is striking, but not beautiful. Her age is revealed by the hard lines about her eyes and mouth, and her shock of close-cropped gray hair. A lifetime spent battling the forces of the supernatural has taken a toll on her body; she has a bad limp (her left knee was crushed by a golem during a mission in Prague), is missing two fingers on her left hand (bitten off by a Brazilian were-jaguar), and is hard of hearing (partially deafened during an assassination attempt against a thunder-mage). Accordingly, when out in the field she sports a prosthetic device on her hand, a knee brace, and a hearing aid. She bears more than a few scars, and though most are long faded, she has taken to wearing heavy makeup to cover those on her face. She wears a dental plate to conceal several broken and missing teeth.

As Cold Comfort she is outfitted in a tight fitting, lightly padded black body suit, over which she wears a military issue flak jacket. The flak jacket is modified to hold her weapons – mostly stakes, silver spikes, and throwing knives. Various pockets and pouches in her uniform hold other items useful against demons, the undead and other practitioners of magic, such as garlic, vials of holy water, and a salt (useful against voodoo-spawned zombies). She wears a leather and chainmail neck collar for additional protection against vampires and the like. A small cross of blessed silver hangs from her neck – the bottom end is pointed, and it can be used as a dagger. Her crossbow-gun and quiver hang from her belt, while a wicked looking blade (forged from cold iron and consecrated with blessed names) is strapped to her right thigh. She's

nicknamed the blade “Judgment” and has claimed the head of more than one supernatural foe with it.

POWERS AND TACTICS

Maureen has no actual superpowers, but she is in remarkable physical condition despite her advancing age and multiple injuries. She is more than a match for most hand-to-hand fighters half her age. In addition to her martial arts skills, Cold Comfort is an expert in the use of blades, crossbows, and throwing knives. She has mastered various esoteric martial arts styles devised specifically to deal with the denizens of the supernatural world, techniques that allow her to go toe-to-toe with creatures such as vampires and were-wolves. Her single-minded focus on her mission (read: fanaticism) allows her to push herself past the point of human exhaustion and endure pain that would otherwise incapacitate a human being.

She knows the strengths and weaknesses of dozens of supernatural creatures, and usually has the right equipment on her person to deal with nearly any one of them – everything from salt packets to holy water. Though she despises using magic, Cold Comfort has learned a few rituals related to exorcism, warding against the undead, and dispelling the effects of a magician’s spells. Given the right materials and a little time, she can banish a ghost, trap a lycanthrope in beast form, or force a demon from a host body.

Cold Comfort is aware that for all of her drive and training, she is still a normal human being going up against beings that are far more than her match physically. Of necessity, she has become increasingly sly and cunning as she grows older and her injuries continue to mount. She carefully scouts out her targets, learning as much as possible before making a move against them. She always makes sure to choose the proper weapons for the mission at hand. Cold Comfort will use any dirty trick or underhanded tactic necessary to gain an advantage against her inhuman prey. She avoids getting into open confrontations with the monsters she hunts, preferring to stalk her targets and then strike them by surprise when they are vulnerable or distracted. If a target does not go down after one or two attacks, she will retreat and regroup, returning at a later date to finish what she started. She is superlatively skilled at sneaking about, staging ambushes, and using “hit and run” tactics against her foes.

IN GAME

Cold Comfort is a single-minded woman with an unrelenting goal—to rid the world of the supernatural and occult forces that prey on people

like her poor dead family. Chances are the only time she’ll encounter the heroes is when their goals intersect or they find themselves in contention due to misunderstanding or subterfuge. Maureen had no plans of giving up her crusade anytime soon, and she may cross the heroes’ path at any time and at any place in the world. Adventure ideas that could help incorporate Cold Comfort into your campaign follow:

Nothing is Black and White: The poorer sections of the city are being terrorized by a super-strong psychopath the newspapers have dubbed the LummoX. He is a hulking mass of muscle that seemingly appears out of nowhere to strike and then fades back into the shadows. The LummoX is believed responsible for a series of brutal attacks that have left three dead and fifteen hospitalized, some of whom are in critical condition. The LummoX primarily targets women, particularly prostitutes and drug addicts, though he has attacked men as well, and one of those killed was a female police officer. As they begin their search, the heroes are contacted by an out of town hero known as the Bride. The Bride costume fits her name, as she keeps her features hidden behind a white veil and silver-trimmed cloak, heightening the air of mystery that seems to follow her everywhere. She explains the LummoX is a Jekyll and Hyde type, a puny, emotionally repressed chemist named Lee Bishop who uses a sinister serum to transform into a brutish creature and act out his aggressions. The Bride clashed with the LummoX two years ago, and with the help of Cold Comfort, another female vigilante, she managed to chase the monster out of New Orleans. Unfortunately she was not successful in tracking the LummoX down until now, when the attacks began in the PCs’ hometown. She offers her assistance in capturing the creature. If the PCs are cautious and decide to first look into the Bride’s story, everything checks out.

As the heroes’ pursuit of the LummoX plays out, the Bride proves to be a dedicated and resourceful ally, relentless in her pursuit and well-versed in urban combat tactics, not to mention possessed of superhuman strength, speed, stamina and senses. She carries an enchanted knife which seems to cut through anything and return to her hand when thrown, and she uses it skillfully. She also exhibits some unusual behavior; she never eats or drinks anything, never removes her heavy robes even if the weather is good, and does her best to keep to the shadows. She is notably more active and vital at night. If questioned, she explains that an ancient curse placed on her by an enemy causes strong light

to weaken her powers. The investigation leads to one of the city's seedier sections, finally taking the heroes to a crumbling, abandoned tenement building. When they reach the building's entrance they find the body of Lee Bishop laying across the front steps, his throat cut. Someone has already put an end to his threat.

Suddenly, a tall, leather-clad figure steps out from the doorway and hurls a glass vial at the Bride. The vial shatters and splashes the Bride with some sort of liquid, immediately causing the flesh underneath her costume to smoke and sizzle. The woman trains a crossbow on the Bride, the weapon's laser sights targeting her heart. She throws a pair of photographs to the ground next to her. The photos depict the bloody, mutilated bodies of two young women. "Didja think I forgot about what happened two years ago, you bloodsucking witch? Think again."

Cold Comfort accuses the Bride of killing the two women in the photographs. She explains that when she and the Bride teamed up against the LummoX they came across two of the monstrous villain's victims in an alleyway after days of trying to run the monster down. Both women were badly beaten and bleeding from multiple wounds, but still alive. The Bride told Cold Comfort to continue the chase while she got help for the women. But both were DOA at the emergency room, expiring from massive blood loss. The Bride claimed they were simply too badly hurt to save, but Cold Comfort knew better. She'd seen people with worse injuries survive. She did some digging of her own and found out that both women had terrible neck wounds – wounds that weren't there when she came across them in the alley. She put two and two together and deduced the truth: the Bride is a vampire. Cold Comfort had other matters that kept her busy for a while, but she always settles matters eventually. Cold Comfort has taken care of the LummoX and now she's ready to put an end to the Bride.

Once confronted, the Bride falls to her knees and breaks down crying. She confesses that she is indeed a vampire, and was once in the mental thrall of the vampire lord known as the Wallachian, but protests that she is not evil, swearing that until that terrible night in New Orleans she had not taken a human life since the Second World War. She fights her curse everyday, but had dedicated her undead existence to saving lives instead. Yes, she did feed on the two injured women, but she never intended to kill them. She was so exhausted from the battle and the chase... there was so much blood in the alleyway, everywhere... she knows she lost control, and she regrets her actions everyday, but it was one terrible moment of weakness in half a century of good

THE BRIDE

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The Bride, PL 10

Str 22, Dex 18, Con -, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 20

Skills: Acrobatics 10 (+14), Bluff 8 (+13), Diplomacy 12 (+17), Disguise (+5), Escape Artist (+4), Gather Info 6 (+11), Handle Animal (+5), Intimidate 10 (+15), Knowledge (arcane lore) 8 (+9), Notice 8 (+11), Search 6 (+7), Sense Motive 4 (+7), Stealth 8 (+12)

Feats: Acrobatic Bluff, Attack Specialization 3 (Enchanted Gypsy Throwing Knife), Animal Empathy, Fascinate (Diplomacy), Fearless, Improved Pin, Instant Up, Move-by Action, Power Attack, Precise Shot 2, Rage 1, Sneak Attack 2, Startle

Powers: **Animal Control 8** (Extras: Area; Flaws: Limited to bats, rats, and wolves), **Drain Constitution 1** (blood drain), **Device 7** ("Enchanted Gypsy Throwing Knife", hard to lose), **Immunity 30** (Fortitude saves), **Insubstantial 2** (gaseous), **Protection 7** (Extras: Impervious; Flaws: Limited against blessed, silver, or magical weapons), **Regeneration 5** (Resurrection, not when staked or beheaded; Source: blood), **Super-Movement 1** (wall-crawling)

Devices: *Enchanted Gypsy Throwing Knife* (array): **Blast 10** (Power Feats: Affects Insubstantial, Homing 2, Split Attack; Extras: Penetrating), **Strike 10** (Power Feats: Accurate 2, Affects Insubstantial, Split Attack, Extras: Penetrating, Vampiric),

Combat: Attack +5, +8 (Enchanted Knife, Thrown), +10 (Enchanted Knife, Melee) Defense +17, +13 (flat-footed), Initiative +4

Saves: Toughness +7 (+7 flat-footed, +0 against blessed, silver, or magical weapons), Fortitude -, Reflex +8, Will +7

Drawbacks: Weakness (dependence on blood, Common, Minor), Weakness (holy symbols, dazed for one round by losing an opposed Charisma check, Common, Moderate), Weakness (sunlight, minor, per round, destroyed after 10 rounds)

Totals: Abilities 28 + Skills 20 (80 ranks) + Feats 17 + Powers 98 + Combat 24 + Saves 20 – Drawbacks 13 = 194 PP

works... She begs for forgiveness. But Cold Comfort is in no mood to show mercy.

The Bride may have to answer for her crimes, but does she deserve the brutal death that Cold Comfort intends for her? If the PCs use mental powers or other means to confirm the Bride's story, they find no evidence that she is lying; she has a bona fide reputation as a hero, and is not a suspect in any other

crimes. If the PCs prevent her from destroying the Bride, Cold Comfort will retreat rather than getting into a protracted fight and risk capture, but will later return to make one last attempt at taking out the Bride. She will likely stage her attempt if and when the heroes have handed the vampire over to the proper authorities (whoever that may be in the campaign).

ENDGAME

After searching for years, Maureen has finally come across what she has been looking for since she was a child; the spell that will allow her to rescue the spirits of her mother and sisters. This incantation will allow her to call up Sadus, the misery demon that claimed her family's souls over thirty-five years ago. If performed properly the magic rite will summon the thing to her and prevent it from fleeing back to the Underworld, and force the demon to fight her one on one. From everything Maureen has read, slaying the demon will free all the souls unjustly imprisoned by the creature or his servants, allowing them to go on to their final reward.

Unfortunately, when Cold Comfort performs the ritual an unexpected visitor shows up—the shade of Mr. Alabaster. The ghostly apparition sabotages the protective wards involved in containing the gateway that the spell opens up, resulting in not only Sadus but also dozens of other demons escaping from the portal. Cold Comfort manages to narrowly escape but can do nothing to prevent the creatures from going out to ravage the city. The heroes will have their hands full as they attempt to save their city and corral the demons, while Cold Comfort continues her pursuit of Sadus, determined to finish her mission and save her family's souls.

If Cold Comfort is successful in slaying Sadus, she may consider hanging up her crossbow and taking a much-deserved rest.

If Sadus escapes then she'll stay on his trail until she catches him or dies in the process.

DEADWORKS

Back in the heyday of the old Soviet Union, Anatoly Andropov was a high-ranking agent of the Null Directorate and a talented practitioner of the occult sciences, being particularly skilled at necromancy. His Null Directorate superiors were well aware of his mystical proclivities and Anatoly was considered an important paranormal asset in the superhuman arms race that existed between the Eastern Bloc nations and the West. He was assigned as an intelligence liaison to one of the Soviets' official government super teams, the United Federalist Front, and given the codename Deadworks, though he never served on the frontlines with the team. His status as a superhuman was highly classified to enhance his continued usefulness as a covert agent. Still, Anatoly's necromantic skills were the unofficial reason that the Soviet superheroes Iron Curtain and the Proletarian Protector were seen again and again after their reported deaths in the Afghanistan conflict. Of course, neither was observed

to speak nor make public appearances alone.

Anatoly's other passion was conspiracy theory. He was consumed with investigating and tracking down the kernels of truth behind all sorts of mysterious rumors and paranoid tales. As his investigations progressed, however, Anatoly came to believe that a world-spanning conspiracy did exist—one that involved a handful of powerful mystics who basically orchestrated all major world events. This group, variously referred to as the "Red Council" or the "Nine Old Men" in the texts Anatoly could track down, were seemingly responsible for many of the ills that plagued mankind, as they kept their hold on power through oppression, wars, and disasters.

VITAL STATS: DEADWORKS

Quote: "THIS BODY I CURRENTLY WEAR IS ONLY A MEANS TO A GREATER END, COMRADE. YOUR FORTHCOMING DEMISE IS ANOTHER SUCH MEANS."

Real Name: Anatoly Andropov

Aliases: None

Occupation: Former KGB operative turned undead zealot

Legal Status: Officially dead

Dual Identity: Existence not publicly known

Marital Status: Divorced prior to death

Known Relatives: Ex-wife Nathalie, brothers Anton and Gregori, sister Eva, several nieces and nephews

Affiliation: None

Base of Operations: Mobile

Age: 53 (Effectively ageless)

Eye Color: Variable (appears brown in his own ghostly form)

Hair Color: Variable (appears brown in his own ghostly form)

Height: Variable (appears 6'4" in his own ghostly form).

Weight: Variable (appears thin in his own ghostly form)

Distinguishing Marks: Bodies possessed inevitably begin to show signs of deterioration

Anatoly grew determined to shatter this conspiracy, bring down this cabal, and give humanity back the keys to their own destiny. He drew up grand plans for the conspiracy's overthrow. Anatoly knew he would have to be careful—undoubtedly there were many agents of the conspiracy serving in the KGB and the Null Directorate. Still, he had many intelligence contacts around the world, and surely there were some to be trusted. Furthermore, as Deadworks he had access to top secret information on many of the world's paranormals and super-humans.. He would contact a select worthy few, tell them what he knew, and enlist their aid in his cause. But Anatoly would never get the chance.

Anatoly was murdered shortly following the failed coup that attempted to unseat Russia's then-Premier Mikhail Gorbachev and install a hard-line pro-communist government. His death came the day after the Soviet Union was dissolved and Boris Yeltsin assumed control. Anatoly was shot from long range when he stepped outside his apartment to retrieve the morning newspaper. For anyone else this would have been the end, but not for Anatoly. The combination of his occult power and sheer will—and his obsession with the riddle of the Nine Old Men—allowed his spirit to live on past his body's demise. Anatoly Andropov had been assassinated, but Deadworks lived on.

In some ways, Anatoly's "condition" has proven to be an advantage—he now operates unseen and unimpeded by physical frailties. He found that if he needed a corporeal shell, he could possess the bodies of the recently departed, provided the bodies were mostly intact. Victims of brain trauma and heart attacks were ideal for this purpose, and were plentiful in the emergency rooms of Eastern European hospitals. This proved to be a necessity, not a mere convenience, as Anatoly soon realized that unless he regularly spent time in a corporeal body, his link to the material world

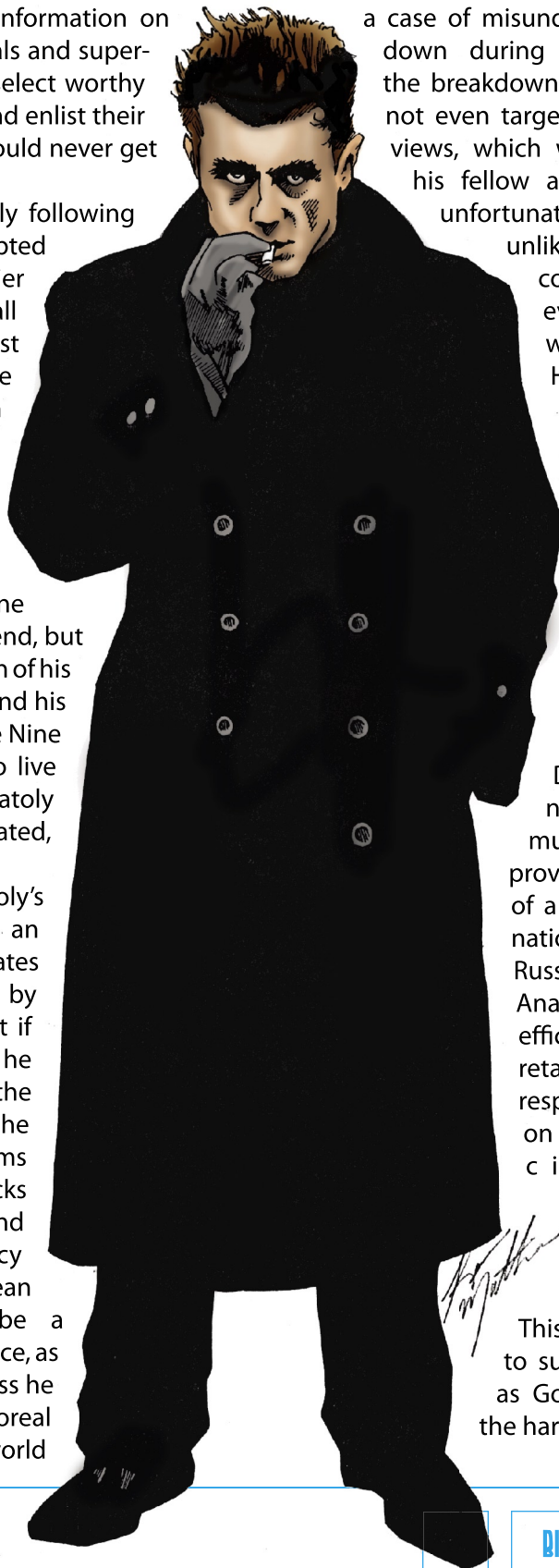
weakened and his spirit form began to fade from earthly existence. Fortunately, in his new state he could now sense imminent death, allowing him to locate soon-to-be available bodies with relative ease. Deadworks now walks the Earth in nearly any form or body he chooses.

Ironically, Anatoly's assassination had nothing to do with his discovery of the "conspiracy," though he fervently believes it did. In fact it was just a snafu, a case of misunderstood orders that came down during the confusion following the breakdown of the USSR. Anatoly was not even targeted for his pro-Gorbachev views, which were controversial among his fellow agents. It was all just an unfortunate mistake. Deadworks is unlikely to believe this unless confronted with compelling evidence, but even he is, it will not change his plans. His mission in life was to unravel the mystery of the Nine Old Men, and now it is his mission in death.

PERSONALITY

Anatoly was a consummate player in the Cold War between the United States and the USSR for nearly three decades. Despite his service as a Null Directorate agent he was never a true Communist, much less a Stalinist, and he provided his services more out of a sense of adventure and a nationalist loyalty to Mother Russia than Marxist ideology. Anatoly was always cunning, efficient, and ruthless, but retained a sense of honor. He respected worthy opponents on the "other side," kept any civilian casualties incurred on his missions to a minimum, and generally tried to act like a decent human being.

This is what eventually led him to support the reformers, such as Gorbachev and Yeltsin, over the hardliners. It is also what moti-



DEADWORKS

PL 8

STR	-	-	INT	+6	22
DEX	+3	16	WIS	+4	18
CON	-	-	CHA	+4	18
TOUGHNESS			FORTITUDE		
+6			-		
REFLEX			WILL		
+8			+15		

SKILLS

Bluff 12 (+16), Computers 2 (+8), Craft (chemical) 8 (+14), Diplomacy 8 (+12), Disable Device 2 (+8), Disguise 4 (+8), Drive 2 (+5), Escape Artist 2 (+5), Gather Information 12 (+16), Intimidate 4 (+8), Knowledge (arcane lore) 12 (+18), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+10), Knowledge (physical sciences) 4 (+10), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 8 (+14), Language 12 (Native Russian, Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese - Cantonese, Chinese - Mandarin, English, French, German, Latin, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian), Medicine 2 (+6), Notice 8 (+12), Profession (spy) 8 (+12), Search 8 (+14), Sense Motive 8 (+12), Stealth 6 (+9)

FEATS

Artificer, Assessment, Eidetic Memory, Equipment 2, Fearless, Improved Aim, Precise Shot, Quick Draw, Ritualist, Set-Up, Sneak Attack, Well-Informed

POWERS

Immunity 30 (Fortitude save), **Insubstantial 4** (affected by magic; *Extras*: Linked to Invisibility; *Flaws*: Permanent), **Invisibility 1** (*Extras*: Linked to Insubstantial; *Flaws*: Permanent), **Magic 6**, **Possession 4** (*Flaws*: Only Usable On Recently Dead Bodies), **Super-Senses 7** (Infravision, Detect Impending Death [Acute, Ranged], Detect Spirits [Acute, Ranged]), **Animate Objects 1** (*Power Feats*: Progression 4; *Extras*: Horde, *Flaws*: Corpses only)

EQUIPMENT

Deadworks can draw upon caches of KGB and Null Directorate equipment left from the Cold War for minor items as needed.

COMBAT

Attack +5, Grapple (by body's strength +5), Damage (unarmed by body's strength), Defense +8, Knockback -3, Initiative +3

TOTALS

Abilities 34 + Skills 34 (136 ranks) + Feats 12 + Powers 91 + Combat 26 + Saves 22 = 209 PP

vates him to go after the cabal he believes is responsible for so much of the evil in the world, including his own murder.

Since his death, Anatoly has become obsessed with exposing the world-wide conspiracy to a point of near-fanaticism and, for the most part, it is this obsession that anchors him to the material world. If he were to give up his mission—or else solve the mystery and bring down the conspiracy—he would most likely pass on to whatever afterlife might await him. As time goes by, Deadworks is increasingly desperate in his attempt to expose the “Red Council” and increasingly detached from humanity. He has begun to commit acts that he would never have considered when he was alive, taking innocent people as hostages, taking risky actions that endanger many civilians, and so on. How far Anatoly will travel down this road remains to be seen, but his behavior is erratic at best and near psychotic at worst.

Deadworks' activities generally involve borrowing convenient bodies, gathering information on the world-wide plot he believes is going on all around him, and occasionally committing acts of assassination, extortion, or theft, targeting those he believes are agents of the conspiracy. He also sometimes contacts superheroes or government officials and attempt to persuade them to join his crusade. He takes their refusal as evidence of their complicity with his enemies.

APPEARANCE

To those capable of perceiving Anatoly's ghostly form, he appears as a gaunt but otherwise utterly ordinary looking man, with thinning brown hair and brown eyes, dressed in casual clothes – a gray sweater and brown slacks (the clothes he was wearing when he was assassinated). The un-living bodies he possesses vary wildly in appearance; Anatoly has worn the flesh of everyone from flabby middle-aged bureaucrats to muscular gym rats to world-weary prostitutes. His “borrowed” bodies all tend to become rather gruesome looking after a time, as even Anatoly's occult skills cannot completely halt the process of decay. Besides, Deadworks is rarely careful about how he treats his “vessels,” and makes little attempt to treat any wounds or serious injuries the bodies sustain in the course of his field work. Once a body becomes too badly damaged, he simply abandons it for another. He does have one distinguishing characteristic: a fondness for vintage trench coats, either black or dark brown, a holdover from his time with the Null Directorate. As he has a strong preference for operating in cold, rainy weather, this

fashion quirk serves a practical purpose as well.

POWERS & TACTICS

As a disembodied spirit, Deadworks is invulnerable to most forms of conventional harm, can pass through barriers like locked doors and walls with ease, and has no need for food, rest, or sleep. However he also cannot smell, taste, touch or move anything while in this state—to do so he must possess the body of a recently deceased human being.

Deadworks can also use his necromancy to animate corpses without possessing them. These essentially act as mindless zombies, though Anatoly can control their actions so long as he is within sight of them, or even give them a few simple commands (“Attack anyone who comes through that door”, etc.). When not being controlled, these zombies will simply wander around purposelessly, attacking anyone who they bump into or who comes too close. Unlike movie zombies, they have no need to eat human flesh, and they cannot spread their undead state by biting or clawing living beings.

Deadworks retains much of the occult knowledge he had while alive, though he no longer wields the same level of magic. He is still adept at brewing up assorted drugs, poisons, and potions—everything from deadly toxins to truth serums to vapors that cause temporary bouts of rapid aging. He can also work various incantations and rituals, so long as he has access to the proper materials. In addition to his occult abilities, Anatoly still has all the skills he was taught during his long career in the KGB and the Null Directorate. He is a skilled code-breaker, interrogator, marksman, and spy. He was trained in basic martial arts like all agents, but never really became proficient at hand-to-hand combat. If he has to get up close and personal he will attempt to take a target by surprise—a club to the back of the head, a garrote slipped about an unsuspecting victim’s neck, or the like. As he is constantly changing host bodies it is relatively easy for him to take his targets unawares, especially as the bodies he assumes tend to be mostly non-threatening civilian types. When alive, Anatoly had access to all sorts of classified information on the superhumans of the United States and other Western powers, including secret identities and origins, so Deadworks could easily exploit this knowledge to gain leverage over heroes.

IN GAME

An easy way to introduce Deadworks into a campaign setting is to have the heroes investigate a rash of morgue robberies where the bodies disappear and

ORIGIN-IN-A-BOX

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You were a member of the UFF during the years prior to the Soviet Union’s collapse. You were trained by Deadworks decades ago, but now that he is a ghost you have been assigned to eliminate him. You were outfitted with top of the line training, equipment and Bio-Psi implants to complete this task. It is possible that you have been dispatched on this mission due to the quiet influence of the Nine Old Men, perhaps without your knowledge.

This origin serves to introduce a hero with a specific task to perform in the campaign—a task that may bring the hero’s goals in line with those of the other heroes, at least for a time. Whether or not the hero continues to pursue his or her mission after discovering Deadwork’s secret agenda will be up the player. Whatever the case, the hero could also become involved in the conspiracy of the Nine Old Men (if they do indeed exists), or in the rivalries, secret conflicts, and espionage that still exists between the remnant powers of the Cold War.

UFF Special Agent, Template

Skills: Acrobatics 5, Climb 4, Computers 4, Gather Info 6, Investigate 6, Arcane Lore 6, Notice 4, Stealth 4

Feats: Assessment, Attack Focus (Ranged) 2, Diehard, Favored Opponent (Undead), Improved Critical (blast)

Powers: Enhanced Dexterity 6, Regeneration 9 (Injured 3, Staggered 3, Disabled 3), **Device 4** (“Ether Carbine”; easy to lose) **Blast 9** (Power Feats: Affects Insubstantial, Improved Range), **Super-Senses 1** (Spirit Awareness)

Cost: 44 PP

are found in strange, seemingly random places (hotel rooms, the waterfront, public transportation, etc.). Perhaps a pattern emerges in the investigation, which leads the heroes to Deadworks’ trail. Perhaps the Heroes encounter Deadworks in the body of someone they know to be dead. In either case the heroes will have to face that they are literally hunting a ghost. Other adventure ideas follow below:

Close to Home: A character close to the heroes (a police officer, government official, or reporter, perhaps) becomes even more helpful and friendly than usual, but also more inquisitive. If questioned about the change in attitude, the character explains that he or she has decided to become involved in

THE CONSPIRACY



Whether or not there actually is a vast conspiracy of sinister mystics is up to the individual GM. If none exist in the campaign, Deadworks will grow ever more dangerous as his inability to “prove” the existence of the cabal takes him over the edge. If such a group does operate in the campaign world, even if it is slightly different than what Anatoly imagines, then Deadworks may actually be cast as a hero of sorts. Whether the rumors are true or not, some theorists have stated the “Red Council” is veiled reference to an actual cabal of mystic called the Crimson Covenant, though few believe these powerful sorcerers have quite the level of control over the real world that many have ascribed to the Nine Old Men.

doing work that means something, that actually makes the world a better place, and really getting behind the heroes’ efforts seems like the best way to do so.

Unbeknownst to the PCs, the character died of a heart attack a few days ago and was subsequently possessed by Deadworks. Deadworks uses his new host body to get closer to the heroes, gathering information about their strengths and weaknesses. When he ascertains to his satisfaction that the heroes can be trusted, that they are not part of the “conspiracy,” he reveals the truth to them—the host body was beginning to show obvious signs of decay anyway). Deadworks goes into enthusiastic detail about the world-wide plot he is trying to put an end to. He explains that he is there to enlist them in his mission. He wants their help because he has learned that an up and coming young senator is working for the Red Council, secretly fomenting chaos and strife between nations. His research shows that this figure has used magic to obtain his position, clouding the minds of voters, and may eventually work his way into the Presidency. He needs the PCs’ aid in taking the senator out permanently.

Deadworks first tries to use persuasion to sway the heroes, going on about the dire consequences of allowing a servant of the Red Council to go on acquiring political influence and prestige. When and if the PCs refuse to participate in assassination, Deadworks turns to blackmail and coercion, threatening to harm the PCs’ friends and family members. The heroes will have to protect their loved ones while working to uncover whether any of what Deadworks told them is true. In fact, the senator was elected with the help of magic, but he had no knowledge of it—his campaign was helped by the

efforts of his wife, who is secretly a potent witch. But, neither has any connection to any sort of greater conspiracy.

Old Heroes Never Die...Or Fade Away: Deadworks has discovered the existence of a clandestine U.S. agency conducting high-level research into the supernatural, codenamed The Department. This agency, responsible for developing responses to superhuman threats against national security, has recently captured all the resources of a major league supervillain, a scientist and sorcerer who recently tried and failed to achieve apotheosis and ascend to godhood. These resources include the ruins of a massive dimension spanning vehicle, a host of alien biological material, and the remnants of the sinister machine that was instrumental in the villain’s scheme, a bizarre device capable of transforming human beings in strange and unpredictable ways. The arch-villain’s plans were disrupted by the brave actions of a veteran super team. These stalwarts defeated the would-be demigod in his own extra-dimensional realm, putting an end to the menace he posed. Sadly, these heroes were all killed when the plane-spanning ship dropped out of Infraspaces and crashed in the Mojave Desert.

Federal authorities moved in quickly to secure the scene and hush up the actual details about what had happened. The public story is that the heroes perished while stopping an extraterrestrial invasion force, and that the invaders’ “starship” was completely destroyed, along with all its crew. The government actually saved a great deal of the technology and life-forms they pulled from the wreckage. They have begun shipping various parts of their salvage to various Department sites across the country for study. The primary site is located in the PCs’ home city. It poses as a simple branch of a local university, a training ground for post-doctoral students.

Deadworks believes that The Department is actually a front for the conspiracy, that the U.S. officials who sanctioned the program all have ties to the cabal, though some are unaware of whom they are really serving (whether this is true or not is of course up to the GM). Deadworks has no intention of allowing the cabal access to the immense occult resources represented by the government’s find. Knowing that time is of the essence, he decides to mount an all-out assault against the Department research center. He is determined to destroy the alien artifacts and any knowledge the agency may have already gleaned from them. He normally employs more subtle measures but feels that a drastic problem requires a drastic solution.

When the heroes respond to reports of an all-out superhuman siege against a college laboratory building, they will be confronted with the unexpected scene of battlesuit-clad government troops battling a half-dozen animated mangled corpses dressed in colorful costumes. Even more startling, these ambulatory cadavers appear to be the recently deceased heroes who were reported to have valiantly perished protecting the world from an alien army! Worse, these gruesome revenants still seem capable of rudimentary thought and speech, alternately mocking the PCs or begging to be put out of their misery. The reanimated heroes are more “alive” than Deadworks’ usual zombies because of a strange after-effect of their time in Infraspaces. Deadworks himself is present at the scene, directing his minions. He also possesses the bodies of fallen government agents, causing havoc in the ranks of the troops. The scene is pure pandemonium.

ENDGAME

If Deadworks does expose the Nine Old Men and bring them down, or mortally injure their organization, he may simply fade away to whatever reward awaits him. But if Deadworks never proves his conspiracy theory he will linger forever, damned to investigate for all eternity. He will remain unable to leave this world because of his unfinished business, and somewhere, perhaps, nine old men are sharing a laugh at the ghost’s expense.

Whether or not there actually is a vast conspiracy of sinister mystics is up to the individual GM. If none exist in the campaign, Deadworks will grow ever more dangerous as his inability to “prove” the existence of the cabal takes him over the edge. If such a group does operate in the campaign world, even if it is slightly different than what Anatoly imagines, then

Deadworks may actually be cast as a hero of sorts. Whether the rumors are true or not, some theorists have stated the “Red Council” is veiled reference to an actual cabal of mystic called the Crimson Covenant, though few believe these powerful sorcerers have quite the level of control over the real world that many have ascribed to the Nine Old Men.

THE MAGISTER

Ibrahim, who would one day become the Magister, was born in Venice, Italy in 1265, the son of a rugged North African sailor turned innkeeper and a beautiful Italian seamstress. A child prodigy, by early adolescence he spoke several languages, and achieved renown across Europe as a philosopher, scientist, athlete, fencer, and horseman. At age seventeen he set off to sea, becoming first a famed explorer and later a wealthy merchant and financier. He was sought out for his patronage by bankers, would-be explorers, scholars, and even nobles. In Egypt, he became known as “al-Alim,” Arabic for “the Wise,” and this nickname spread into other languages. In every nation on the Mediterranean, there were legends of Ibrahim the Wise.

But while others attributed Ibrahim’s rise to his ambition, intellect, and a bit of good luck, a select few knew the true secret of his success. Ibrahim the Wise was an accomplished sorcerer. He made liberal, but subtle, use of the mysteries open to him to ensure the success of his endeavors, but he was not merely some venal, power-lusting enchanter. While he freely used his arts to enrich himself, he did much good for others as well, surreptitiously ensuring good crops, healthy children, and long life for those around him. A Muslim by birth and inclination, he promoted the cause of religious tolerance, particularly for the Jewish community present in

VITAL STATS: MAGISTER

Quote: “ATTENDING TO THESE MATTERS IS GROWING INCREASINGLY TIRESOME...BUT I SUPPOSE SOMEONE MUST SHOULDER SUCH COSMIC RESPONSIBILITIES.”

Real Name: Ibrahim al-Alim

Aliases: The Magister has used numerous other identities during his centuries long career.

Occupation: Archadept Arcane, sorcerous protector of the Earth dimension.

Legal Status: None on Earth. Effectively the ruler of several extradimensional realms.

Dual Identity: The Magister has made rare appearances acting as a “super-hero,” but few humans know of his true role as the Archadept Arcane.

Marital Status: Current widower; several wives, ex-wives, consorts, and paramours among several planes and worlds; multiple generations of offspring.

Affiliation: None.

Base of Operations: Multiversal.

Age: 740+ years old, effectively immortal.

Eye Color: Black.

Hair Color: Black (receding).

Height: 6’1”

Weight: 265 lbs.

Distinguishing Marks: Several visibly false teeth (fashioned from precious metals such as gold, platinum, and electrum); shaved head, long, elaborately braided beard.

Venice. He attained even greater fame when a ballad was written recounting his rescue of the beautiful Spanish noblewoman, the Lady Cassilda de Belcadiz, from bloodthirsty pirates. He fell in love with Cassilda and married her, putting an end to his long years of imtemperate carousing and womanizing.

Eventually, Ibrahim's prominence brought him to the attention of the so-called Order Without End, an assemblage of the most formidable mystics on the mortal plane. They summoned Ibrahim to appear before them—an invitation he was almost as reluctant to accept as he was afraid to decline. As a sorcerer, Ibrahim had been aware of the Order's existence for some time, but had never directly encountered them, as they dealt with matters far removed from Ibrahim's sphere.

In their court beyond the boundaries of time and space, the Order explained that Earth's sorcerous protector, its Archadept Arcane, had been murdered, betrayed by his apprentice Johannes Faustus at the behest of an unearthly being called the

Prime-Mortal (see page 52 for details on the Prime-Mortal). The Order was now responsible for selecting a replacement for the Archadept Arcane and they had chosen Ibrahim. He had ambition, power, intellect, and restraint, but more importantly possessed the requisite degrees of ego, altruism, and pragmatism needed for the position, the icy resolve needed to dispatch the worst threats and the conscience to temper the might he would command with compassion. His skills as a trader and politician would give him a special insight, the wisdom to know when

to fight and when to bargain, and his worldliness made him unlikely to withdraw from mortal affairs as his predecessors had.

When the Order revealed to Ibrahim how many powerful dimensional entities were even now plotting to capitalize on the death of the previous Archadept Arcane by invading our world, he saw little

choice but to accept the Order

Without End's terms. Though he had no desire to accept such responsibilities, how could he decline and allow some lesser individual to face the challenges that lay ahead? Ibrahim agreed to become the new Archadept Arcane.



By ancient tradition, the would-be Archadept was faced with a series of four epic trials. Ibrahim bested Lilith the Mother of All Monsters in a riddle contest, successfully answering questions that had not been posed for a thousand years. He tracked down every stray demon that poor, doomed Pandora had foolishly loosed and conjured them back into the fabled box that had once contained them, ensuring they would not be free for thousands years more. He stalked down the Ghul Lord, the Lord of the Dead, master of the undead scourge that plagued the Middle East, dispelling the pestilence this entity had spread to the Holy Land. Finally, beneath the mountain where the great fallen titan Prometheus lay entombed, Ibrahim captured the essence of elemental fire. He then used the flame to forge a magical blade that would be used by numerous renowned warriors throughout the centuries, under many different names.

When Ibrahim finally accomplished all the given tasks he was rewarded with the mantle of the Magister, Archadept of the Arcane. Ibrahim could now draw upon the eldritch knowledge of any member of the Order. He was granted access to vast mystical resources, the accumulated occult learning and arcane treasures of the ages. He was able to traverse the planes at will, stepping across boundaries both demonic and divine. He was now equipped to face the myriad supernatural menaces that regularly threatened the mortal realm—threats that few human beings would ever realize existed.

In the time since assuming the role, the Magister has met these evils with unsurpassed courage and wisdom, saving humanity from cosmic destruction a dozen times over and secretly engineering the origins of various mystic champions. He halted a curse-war between the lich Koschei the Deathless and the hag-witch Baba Yaga that would have ravaged half the world if left unchecked. He has thwarted the world-conquering machinations of the vampire known as the Wallachian time after time. In the guise of a Templar mystic, he bestowed the Promethean blade to the original White Knight. And he has continually defended the world's sea-coasts from a cult of sea-dwelling hybrids determined to summon degenerate gods to devastate the cities of man.

But all these successes are not without a price. When the Magister prevented the omnipotent Prime-Mortal from infecting all of Europe with a mind-virus that would have corrupted all language, the so-called Plague of Babel, the Prime-Mortal's retaliation was terrible and cruel. In disguise, the Prime-Mortal convinced Ibrahim's wife Cassilda to accept a "love charm" that would keep her husband true to her in his many travels for as long as she lived. But Cassilda

THE MAGISTER

PL 15

STR

+1

12

DEX

+2

14

CON

+5

20

INT

+7

24

WIS

+9

28

CHA

+5

20

TOUGHNESS

+14/10* / +5**

FORTITUDE

+12

REFLEX

+9

WILL

+17

*flat-footed, **without force field

SKILLS

Acrobatics 4 (+6), Bluff 4 (+9), Concentrate 8 (+17), Craft (chemical) 8 (+15), Diplomacy 12 (+17), Disguise 8 (+13), Gather Information 12 (+17), Knowledge (arcane lore) 20 (+27), Knowledge (current events) 4 (+11), Knowledge (earth sciences) 8 (+15), Knowledge (history) 12 (+19), Knowledge (life sciences) 4 (+11), Knowledge (physical sciences) 4 (+11), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 8 (+15), Medicine 8 (+17), Notice 8 (+17), Perform (all nine specialties) 4 in each (+9), Profession (Archadept Arcane) 8 (+15), Ride 4 (+6), Search 8 (+15), Sense Motive 8 (+17), Stealth 4 (+6)

FEATS

Artificer, Assessment, Benefit (status), Defensive Roll 4, Eidetic Memory, Fearless, Improved Initiative 2, Inspire, Jack-of-all-Trades, Leadership, Master Plan, Precise Shot, Quick Change 2, Quick Draw, Ritualist, Second Chance (mind controlled), Well-Informed

POWERS

Comprehend 4 (languages), **Device 2** ("Elfin Boots"), **Device 5** ("Invictus Amulet"), **Device 5** ("Scimitar of the Desert Sun"), **Immunity 1** (aging), **Mind Shield 8**, **Super-Senses 8** (Detect Magic [Acute, Extended, Ranged], Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Low-Light Vision, Time Sense), **Sorcery** (dynamic array): **Magic 18**; **Blast 18**; **Astral Form 6** (Power Feats: Dimensional 3); **Communication 15** (magical sendings; Power Feats: Dimensional 3, Selective, Subtle; Extras: Area); **Confuse 15** (Extras: Area – Burst, Selective Attack); **Deflect 12** (all ranged attacks; Extras: Range); **Healing 11** (Power Feats: Persistent, Regrowth; Extras: Energizing); **Mental Blast 9**; **Paralyze 8** (Power Feats: Affects Insubstantial; Extras: Area – Burst, Range, Selective Attack; Flaws: Slow); **Telekinesis 11** (Power Feats: Precise; Extras: Damaging); **Teleport 13** (Power Feats: Change Direction, Change Velocity, Dimensional 3, Easy, Progression 4)

DEVICES

Elfin Boots: **Speed 4**, **Super-Movement 3** (Air Walking, Sure-Footed, Water Walking), *Invictus Amulet*: **Force Field 5** (Extras: Impervious), **Immunity 9** (life support), **Sensory Shield 3** (all senses), *Scimitar of the Desert Sun* (array): **Strike 8** (Power Feats: Mighty; Extras: Penetrating); **Dazzle 8** (visual; Extras: Area – Cone)

DRAWBACKS

Power Loss (must gesture to use sorcery; Uncommon)

COMBAT

Attack +12, Grapple +13, Damage +1 (unarmed), +9 (scimitar), Defense +16, +14 (flat-footed), Knockback –7, Initiative +10

TOTALS

Abilities 58 + Skills 50 (200 ranks) + Feats 18 + Powers 122 + Combat 56 + Saves 26 = 335 PP

ORIGIN-IN-A-BOX



You wield the Promethean blade. Over the centuries, the weapon has been used to save countless lives and destroy the foulest threats. It is the sword that slew the Ice Dragon of Murmansk, faced down an army of clockwork giants who terrorized Renaissance Spain, and struck the critical blow against the time-devouring Chronophage. From the original White Knight, last survivor of the Knights Templar, and down through the ages to the 21st century, a long-line of heroes have been empowered by this amazing artifact—a long line leading to you. For whatever reason, the Magister (perhaps in disguise or via his agents) chose you to be the new bearer of the blade, but how you use it is up to you. Perhaps you are a new White Knight, or perhaps you have chosen an entirely different crime-fighting persona; whatever your preferences, the blade allows you to transform into your super-heroic self instantaneously, and that is the least of its miraculous powers. It cuts through anything, heightens your reflexes to the point where you can parry machine gun bullets and strike unerringly against your foes, and even grants the power of flight. The flames of truth surround the blade, allowing you to burn away evil, and the crackling whispers of the flames translate any spoken language you hear. Even ghosts and beings from beyond our dimension are not immune to the blade's purifying flame.

This origin serves to provide a hero with a great magical item with a rich legacy. The character need not be privy to this legacy, but such an important and storied item (at least in mystical circles) will no doubt garner the attention of those who covet it and give the hero an important role to play in the threats that menace mankind.

Promethean Blade Wielder, Template

Powers: Device 17 ("Promethean Blade"; hard to lose). *Promethean Blade: Comprehend 3* (languages), **Deflect 10** (all ranged; *Extras*: Ranged, Reflection), **Enhanced Feats 4** (Attack Specialization [sword] 2, Quick Change 2), **Protection 10, Strike 10** (Power Feats: Affects Insubstantial, Incurable, Thrown, Alternate Power [**Fire Control 10** (Power Feats: Affects Insubstantial, Incurable)], Alternate Power [**Flight 12** (Power Feats: Progression)]); *Extras*: Penetrating)

Cost: 68 PP

did not live long. The charm, a black crystal hourglass, caused her to age decades in a matter of days, and

the Magister returned from business in another dimension just in time to hold his wife as she died. As the body of the only woman he had ever loved crumbled to dust in his arms, the Magister swore a terrible oath to destroy the Prime-Mortal or die trying. So far he has not kept this oath, for though the Archadept Arcane and the Eternal Corrupter have clashed many times in the centuries since, the entity has proven too powerful for even the Magister to destroy.

Some observers have traced the Archadept Arcane's more ruthless actions to this time, saying that some part of his compassion died with his beloved wife. Others argue the Magister's absolutely willingness to do whatever it takes for the greater good of humanity must have been why he was chosen. Whatever the truth, certainly the demands of his office have forced the Magister to commit acts that most who consider themselves heroes would never approve of. He helped place Golgotha, the current ruler of the Grand Court of Hell, upon the diabolic throne, assisting the usurper in overthrowing the far more terrible archfiend Ixion, in exchange for a pact that bars demonic forces for invading earth in numbers for a thousand years. He has brokered cosmic treaties that have resulted in entire races being delivered into slavery. He slew the ten year-old daughter of a African tribal wise woman who was destined to become the most formidable evil sorceress to walk the world in eons, and his never forgotten the poor girl's face. He kidnapped an infant troll from his parents and used eldritch means to augment the whelp's troll-born strength and endurance, foreseeing that the brute would one day prove instrumental in turning back an onslaught by the eerie Eldren, a race of dark fey for whom all trolls bear an inborn hatred (see the entry on Troll, page 70).

The Magister has even acted as warlord, personally conquering a number of small other-dimensional realms that would have otherwise posed a danger to mankind. After subjugating their peoples, he adopts the role of benevolent tyrant, setting up puppet governments and introducing what he sees as necessary changes in cultures. Ibrahim carried this process a bit too far with the Vrane, a race of implacable warriors once feared across a multitude of worlds, earned him the enmity of the young Vrane warrior known as Carmody the Rebel (see the entry on Carmody the Rebel, page 16), who has sworn to avenge his people on the Magister. Despite these and other regrets, Ibrahim remains the same pragmatic man he was when he ascended to the office of Archadept Arcane. He does not let sentimentality prevent him from taking any action necessary to

defend Earth's dimension from the horrors outside.

The Magister actions in the past century have been characteristically pivotal in human destiny, and have often brought him into contact with Earth's superhuman champions. In 1939, one of the Magister's oldest friends, an immortal hero and kabbalist known as the Patriarch who had used his superhuman powers to defend the Earth secretly since the time of the Old Testament, chose to reveal himself to the world, acting openly as one of the first superheroes. But by the end of 1940, the Patriarch had been mysteriously abducted, somehow rendered unable to speak the secret name of God that granted him superhuman strength and abilities. In addition, all his descendants, who had that secret name written in the nucleotides of their genetic codes, were slowly exterminated by mysterious assassins, possibly agents of the Prime-Mortal. He found the last three descendants, all children orphaned by the assassinations of their parents, and granted them three amulets he had crafted from a mystery metal he had found in the Patriarch's other-dimensional library. Though the Magister was neither able to solve the mystery of the Patriarch's disappearance nor determine who was killing his descendants, these orphans used the amulets to become the super-heroic Astounding Trio (for more on the destinies of the Patriarch's descendants, see the entry on Armageddon Girl, page 5).

Most recently the Magister brought together the heroes of several worlds to put an end to the threat of the Chronophage, a vast entity from Beyond, said to be the corrupted spirit of the dead god Chronos. This creature devoured time, eradicating seconds, years, and entire epochs in its depredations, throwing the chronology of the universe into tumult. The Magister lent the Promethean Blade to a brave heroine, who used it to strike a crucial blow against the entity that allowed the Magister to and his allies to banish it. With the Chronophage trapped in an empty dimension, the Magister and a host of other mystical heroes worked to repair the timeline, though even they could not completely restore all that was lost. Amazingly, the nature of this event prevented all but a few from remembering it ever occurred.

Recently, Ibrahim has begun to feel anxious and weary, less the ageless Archadept Arcane and more a weary old warrior. He thinks that if he were able to relinquish his duties as the Magister to another, he could devote all his energies to researching a way to destroy the Prime-Mortal, saving countless lives and fulfilling the blood oath he swore seven centuries ago. Thus, he has begun searching for a successor.

Though he has sired numerous children by various

wives and lovers during his centuries-long lifetime, none have shown the mystic potential necessary to serve as Archadept Arcane (though he loved them all nonetheless), and Earth's other mystics have yet to display the unique personality traits the position requires. He even created an apprentice through magic, though the results were disappointing.

Ibrahim alone must be responsible for the selection of a replacement, as the Order Without End is no more—their name ultimately proved ironic, as the council's remaining members were destroyed in the struggle against the Chronophage. He knows he must choose carefully, for the safety of all humanity depends on his judgment. Ironically, the leading contender so far is his sworn nemesis Carmody the Rebel. But he has not given up on Earth's mystic heroes just yet...

PERSONALITY

The Magister is a paradox. He is aloof, brilliant, compassionate, magnanimous, pragmatic, and ruthless. He tries to be kind and merciful, but only so long as these qualities do not interfere with the performance of his duties. He is egotistical and self-indulgent, but never to the detriment of his responsibilities. He is beyond fear and intimidation, even when facing down entities with near god-like power. When dealing with those beneath him, which includes just about everyone, he is curt but not condescending, though he has little patience for explaining his actions to others. Who else could understand the tremendous burden he has shouldered for so long? The Magister is becoming a bit short tempered as his yearning for retirement grows. Ibrahim's impatience with the duties of his office is becoming clear to his confidantes and servants, all of whom hope he can find a suitable successor, and soon.

APPEARANCE

The Magister is a bald, dusky-skinned man of middle years. He is tall and broad-shouldered, and though he maintains his physical prowess, a small paunch betrays something of his age. He maintains a resplendent wardrobe, and is usually draped in beautiful azure, emerald, or crimson robes made of the finest silks and embroidered with threads of gold and silver. Upon his hands, he wears gauntlets forged from gleaming adamantite ore, enabling him to deliver thunderous blows. His feet are shod in tan leather boots around which are fitted slim bands of elfin-steel, and this enchanted footwear allows him to stride effortlessly upon the most treacherous

The mantle of the Archadept Arcane is the highest calling any sorcerer in our dimension could possibly reach. As a result, the tests a candidate for the position must pass are truly epic in scope, and will become the stuff of legend for others in the occult community. The Magister is not only feared because he is the Archadept Arcane, but because he outwitted Lilith, resealed Pandora's Box, faced down the Ghul Lord, and forged the Promethean Blade. This is the candidate's chance to establish a reputation early on and ensure the future cooperation of Earth's magicians.

Because the Magister is eager to shed his mantle, and has seen the power and resourcefulness of the superhuman champions who now walk the Earth many times in the last part of his career, he has re-written the rules slightly. Many of the Magister's god-like predecessors were members of a "pantheon," an assemblage of similarly powerful and heroic champions, but none were permitted to employ the aid of these allies when they took the tests. For the first time, a candidate for the mantle of Archadept Arcane will be permitted to bring his or her "pantheon" along for the tests. If the candidate is a PC, this means the other PCs may accompany him or her. Even if the candidate is an NPC, if he or she is an ally of the PCs, they may be the allies who assist in completing these epic tasks.

The Magister's tests are as follows:

- The candidate must obtain the tears of the Thunderbird Totem; a powerful spirit trapped in Omaha, Nebraska, U.S. The grid of telephone poles and power-lines that criss-crosses America is in fact a large glyph masterminded by occultists hiding within the U.S. government. The giant occult pattern drawn by the wires strung across North America keeps the Thunderbird Totem, a powerful spirit summoned into earthly form by a multi-tribal council of desperate Native American shamans that included descendants of the legendary Coyote Sand, trapped beneath Offutt Air Force Base, where the phone lines form a nexus. The Thunderbird Totem would've psychically empowered a massive Native American uprising against the U.S. government, but the precognitive occultists successfully captured the spirit the moment it was summoned. To contact the spirit, one must conduct powerful rituals in the caverns far beneath the Air Force Base, causing the trapped spirit to become visible. One must approach the caverns carefully, as Offutt AFB is the headquarters of United States Strategic Command (formerly Strategic Air Command), one of the most heavily patrolled and secured military installations in the world. Once in the caverns, if the candidate performs the proper tribal rituals, the spirit appears as a magnificent falcon-like bird of gigantic proportions, trapped face-up in a large cavern, its wings and beak wrapped in phone-cables and barbed wire. This proud spirit endures its indignity with patience, hoping for freedom that can only come from another gathering of tribal shamans, just like when it was first summoned to Earth. For now, through respectful supplication, kindness, and helping in some small way to ease the Thunderbird Totem's suffering—perhaps covering the barbs of the wire with some magically conjured material, to keep them from stabbing into the spirit's tortured skin—the candidate must obtain the Thunderbird Totem's permission to collect his tears. Once permission is granted, collecting the tears will be easy, as the Thunderbird Totem has been weeping ever since it was imprisoned. Using the tears, the candidate must use other alchemical and magical techniques to create a magical bottle of war-paint which will never run dry, and choose a descendant of one of the shamans who originally summoned the Thunderbird Totem to wear it. The magical war-paint will turn the chosen descendant into a superhuman champion who is destined to help save the Earth from disaster many times in the 21st Century.
- The candidate must obtain the Talbain Codex, an ancient book of spells containing an incantation which would instantaneously cure or destroy every werewolf on Earth. The Codex is kept in the Transylvanian castle of the Wallachian, the most powerful vampire in existence. Source of Bram Stoker's vampire stories and many other legends of the undead, the Wallachian is a brilliant tactician and veteran of a thousand battles, and stealing his property will be extremely difficult. In addition to his own magical defenses and army of inhuman guardians, the Wallachian is allied with many werewolves, who would take drastic action to prevent the Codex from being stolen.

- The candidate must attend a meeting of the leading ministers of the Celestial Bureaucracy, the cabinet of the August Personage in Jade. These ancient, godlike spirits rule the metaphysical realms of Asia, planning the destiny of that part of the world via a complex litany of protocols which much be respected by any who would have a voice in their affairs. Easily angered by impoliteness or improper behavior, the members of this auspicious assemblage are among the most powerful beings in the Earth dimension, and their meeting provides a test of the candidate's ability to conduct business without resorting to confrontation and negotiate with beings much more powerful than he or she can imagine. The candidate's purpose at the meeting is to talk the Celestial Bureaucracy out sending a comet to strike an upcoming environmental conference in Osaka, Japan. The world leaders at this meeting have failed, in the Bureaucracy's view, to respect the ancient forces of nature. Climate changes resulting from are pollution are decreasing the build-up of snow and ice in the Himalayas with every passing year, and Himalayan snow-melt is the source of water for hundreds of millions of Asians. Responsible legislation would combat this problem, but most nations have responded slowly or unsatisfactorily. To risk drought conditions for such large populations is an unconscionable mistake as the August Personage in Jade sees it, not to mention those members of his cabinet who spent millions of years crafting the plate tectonics that created those mountains in order to slake the thirst of future generation. Therefore, the Celestial Bureaucracy has withdrawn the Mandate of Heaven from the Chinese government and other world leaders for failing in their custodianship of the Bureaucracy's protectorate. They feel that it would be best to annihilate the current crop of world leaders, forcing their nations to choose new ones. The comet they are crafting for the job is small, but the resulting impact would wipe out a large portion of Japan and create massive tsunami that would devastate cities across East Asia and the West Coast of the Americas—a fitting punishment for these nations who have failed to honor the Bureaucracy and the laws of nature they helped to write. And the planned loss of life from the impact is many times smaller than the one they believe continued global warming will create. The would-be Archadept Arcane must carefully navigate the intricacies of the Bureaucracy's protocols and plead the case for humanity in order to save many thousands of lives.
- The candidate must destroy the ancient Phoenician god Dagon. Not truly a deity, the god is in fact an inhuman monster whose only remaining worshippers are amphibious cultists who live in scattered communities across the world's seacoasts. The massive creature is immortal, impervious to conventional and even nuclear weapons, and sleeps for long stretches in caverns deep beneath the ocean floor, uninterested in the affairs of man. Nevertheless, his cultists are constantly attempting rituals which will empower their monstrous god to destroy human civilization, paving the way for the hybrids to spread their own beliefs and accursed bloodline across the devastated nations of the world. Dagon's indestructibility even in the face of magic poses a problem, but an enterprising candidate will find a way to end this threat permanently. One possibility is the Patriarch, an ancient kabbalist and friend of the Magister who has been imprisoned in a secret location for most of the last century. The Patriarch was alive in the time of David and Goliath, and when the Philistines made plans to unleash their amphibious god upon the nation of Israel, the Patriarch researched the secrets of the foul deity and discovered a series of marks and sigils that can repel Dagon or even rob him of his immortality. However, the Patriarch's ill-fated decision to act openly as a superhero led to his disappearance, and wherever he is, he cannot speak the secret word that grants him superhuman abilities. If the candidate can find the Patriarch and free him, not only will the means of destroying Dagon be recovered, but also the would-be Archadept Arcane would gain a powerful ally against Dagon and other threats to humanity.

land, the roughest waters, or even the clouds in sky. Around his neck is a brooch that shields his person from many types of harmful spells. Various minor magical baubles and talismans adorn his person, a few hanging from his belt or worn openly on his

fingers, more concealed in the folds of his robe. A magnificent scimitar capable of slashing through steel is secured to his person by a silk sash.

The Magister may take on nearly any form he wishes. If circumstances call for him to travel incognito, he

has crafted a plethora of illusory appearances. He tends to assume a guise consistent with whatever preconceived notions those who see him might have of a “wise old wizard.” He reveals his true form only to those who earn his friendship and respect.

POWERS AND TACTICS

Simply put, the Magister is the most powerful sorcerer the heroes are ever likely to encounter. His skills are overshadowed only by divine avatars, demon princes, and omnipotent entities such as the Prime-Mortal. The Magister is a master of nearly every school of magic, and has access to any number of arcane artifacts. His skills as an administrator, diplomat, researcher, and strategist are almost unparalleled. He has an incredible intellect, honed by investigating the greatest mysteries of the ages, and a will strengthened by decades of fighting conflicts beyond the ken of mankind.

The Magister rarely becomes involved in personal confrontations. He instead dispatches minions, manipulates enemies against one another, or calls on those in his debt to deal with most threats. A newer tactic is enlisting the aid of costumed heroes, who seem to need little more to motivate them except his assurances that humanity is in danger. Earth’s greatest heroes know the Magister and trust his words. The Archadepth Arcane values and respects that trust, but is not above abusing it in times of need.

IN GAME

The Magister’s best function in most campaigns is as a source of adventures. Increasingly over the years, he has come to rely on agents to maintain the safety of the Earth dimension rather than acting himself. There are few temporal matters that demand such direct attention, and besides, he has so many affairs to manage he can’t too much time on any single problem. He is known among the crime-fighting community as a fellow hero and the world’s foremost authority on the occult, though no one knows the true lengths he has gone to in his quest to safeguard humanity. The Magister is likely to contact heroes and recruit them to defeat interdimensional menaces and supernatural threats. For many heroes, saving the world is a rare and important event; for the Magister protecting Earth from cataclysmic peril is a never-ending task, and he delegates all lower priority dangers to third-parties so he can focus on the most important. Occasionally, with truly dire threats such as the Chronophage, even the Magister’s own powers are not enough, and he will personally lead a task force of heroes to save the day.

Another factor is the Magister’s search for a replacement. His current candidates are not ready, but if one of the PCs is a mystically oriented hero, that character may be someone the Magister grooms as the next Archadepth Arcane. This is a mixed blessing, as the Magister takes an interest in the PC’s welfare but begins using direct or indirect means to put him or her in increasingly difficult situations, in order to test the new candidate’s suitability. This can result in many strange adventures, which seem to occur as the result of highly unlikely coincidences.

Even if the PCs don’t fit the bill themselves, the Magister could enlist them to aid in his search, perhaps investigating other occult heroes or even helping sorcerous villains to find redemption and become suitable apprentices. Some more specific adventure hooks involving the Magister are detailed below:

Lives in the Balance: Some time ago, a megalomaniacal sorcerer attempted to gain ultimate power by transferring all his imperfections to others via an ancient artifact. Those unfortunates who received his imperfections were all strong-willed ordinary people who had unused potential in the mystic arts, and all were saddled with permanent mental or physical disabilities. By the time the villain was stopped and apparently destroyed, over a six innocent people had already been affected. Sadly, no remedy was found for the effects of the artifact, so the victims simply had to cope with their new situations as best they could.

What no one suspected was that the transformation process also imparted a small fraction of the villain’s power to each of the victims. The residual power attracted the attention of the Prime-Mortal. He collected the anger, shame, and hate of those maimed by the madman, and used them to create an astral construct he called the Id Reaper. It wasn’t long before it was strong enough to physically manifest in the real world. Driven by instinct, the thing has begun attacking anyone who attracts the anger of one or more of the six former victims. This has included not only the henchmen and minions of the mad sorcerer, but also ordinary people that have disappointed, spurned, or otherwise upset the six. As the Id Reaper grows stronger it becomes more violent and dangerous, but the disabilities of the six people it is connected to begin to fade. Though they did not willingly summon the thing, they all share vivid dreams about the Id Reaper, and at some level all six are aware of the beast and what it is doing.

As the PCs are alerted to a series of baffling attacks by a monster that can vanish without a trace, the Magister appears to them. He explains the nature

of the Id Reaper and presents them with a bauble that will allow them to track its movements across the ether, predicting where it will strike next. He also informs them that the only way to dispel the beast for good is to convince the six people it is feeding from to consciously renounce the thing, putting aside their desire for revenge. Unfortunately this will mean their disabilities will return.

The Magister could easily resolve the matter, but he senses the hand of the Prime-Mortal and hopes to lure him out of hiding. Besides, he wishes to test the heroes a bit, to see if they might be worthy allies in the future. This provides him with a means of seeing the extent of their might and their intellect, as well as their compassion. If the heroes convince each of the six to sever their connection to the Id Reaper, the thing is destroyed forever. The Magister will then appear before each of the victims and offer some insight or assistance to help them overcome their tragic situations.

Turning Back Time: The Magister discovers a means of undoing a past act that he always deeply regretted. Three hundred years ago he was forced to murder a ten-year-old girl in Africa, a girl who was destined to wreak untold havoc when she grew to adulthood. He has recently uncovered a spell that would have allowed him to rewrite the girl's destiny, transforming the girl's vast mystic potential into nearly boundless creative energy instead. But this does little good now. Even the Archadept Arcane cannot resurrect the long dead, yet perhaps he can prevent that death before it happens.

The Magister appears before the player characters and tells them that he requires their aid in saving an innocent life. He somberly recounts the tale of his dark deed, leaving nothing out, with real shame and pain evident in his eyes. He states that he cannot himself travel back in time to confront his younger self—this could cause a temporal paradox that could disrupt the timeline. Instead he asks the heroes to make the journey instead. He warns them that his past counterpart will not believe their tale. The younger Magister will assume they are trying to deceive him and will respond accordingly. But the heroes should be strong enough to defeat the less experienced version of the Archadept Arcane. If the PCs agree to the mission, he opens a portal to the nation of Kenya as it was three centuries ago. He presents the heroes with a pouch containing a single seed. The heroes must give the girl the seed and tell her to plant it in the soil of her village. When she does so, a rose will rise from the seed and bloom within seconds, and the girl's future will be remade as the

rose's petals bloom. The younger Magister will sense the shift in the girl's destiny and will realize the heroes were being truthful.

Hold the Line: Determined to end the threat of the Prime-Mortal once and for all, the Magister recently traveled along the Span of Worlds until he reached the Universal Nexus, which touches on all other spheres. There, the Magister was able to contact entities from the farthest reaches of the multiverse, cosmic beings normally beyond even his ability to summon. There he made a pact with the Ultimate Lawbringer, an avatar of absolute order. The Ultimate Lawbringer is the bane of all things of Chaos, a foe that even the Prime-Mortal could never defeat. The Magister agreed to serve as a host body, as the avatar could not otherwise manifest in the relatively flimsy reality of the Earth realm.

Unfortunately, when the Magister returns on Earth, the psyche of the Ultimate Lawbringer is so disgusted and appalled by the noise, filth, and disorder of the earthly realm that it immediately seizes control of the Magister's body and sets about remaking the world into a planet of unchanging harmony. This means the end of free will, creativity, and spontaneity, changing the world into a pristine but joyless place. The Lawbringer still intends to keep its bargain with the Magister by destroying the Prime Mortal, but it will do so only after it has perfected the world. The Magister is resisting the creature with all his considerable will, preventing the Lawbringer from unleashing its own powers, limiting it to the Arch-Adept's own magical might. Still, this is enough to begin altering the world until the Avatar of Order can fully emerge.

The heroes are summoned by the New Order, a group of sorcerers recently formed to reestablish Earth's mystic defenses. They are aware of all that has transpired with the Magister, and are taking measures to undo the binding ritual that links him to the Lawbringer. They are close to their goal, but need the heroes to buy them some time. The heroes are charged with delaying the Magister until they can complete their spell. Afterward, the effects of the Lawbringer will be erased.

In this scenario the heroes are not expected to defeat the Magister, just keep him busy. It may even be more dramatic and heroic if the New Order's spell takes effect just as the last of the PCs is about to be vanquished. Any damage the PCs took is undone along with the rest of the Lawbringer's changes, and even the dead are resurrected. So powerful is the New Order's spell that no one but they and the PCs will even remember the Lawbringer's attempt to rewrite reality.

ENDGAME

The Magister is tired. He has fought relentlessly to defend humanity for 700 years and he is ready to do something else with his time. As time passes, he becomes more and more aggressive in helping his possible replacements grow into the sorcerers he needs them to be, enlisting them into increasingly complex scenarios designed to destined them or force them to mature at an accelerated pace.

When and if he finally chooses a successor, the candidate will be tested, just as he was. By tradition, a would-be Archadept Arcane must face four epic trials, and Magister has spent years determining what these quests would be (see Sidebar: The Tests of the Magister for details).

If the Magister finds someone who can pass the tests, he will happily pass on the mantle of the Archadept Arcane to the new candidate. As soon as he believes he has left his successor in a good position to safeguard the Earth without his advice or assistance, Ibrahim will devote himself completely to finding a permanent means of destroying the Prime-Mortal, and fulfilling the oath he made all those centuries before.

MIDNIGHT EDITION

Once upon a time, Alexander Lane was on the road to respectability. He was a hotshot UCLA journalism student who landed a contract with a major L.A. newspaper even before graduation. Alex's good looks, charm, and intelligence soon marked him as a rising media star. He was making good money, meeting all the right people, and going to all the right clubs with all the right women. In his spare time he indulged in his hobbies—taking sexy photographs of beautiful women and reading everything he could lay his hands on about the occult, neopaganism, voodoo and the like. Both hobbies

came more out of jaded boredom than anything else. Then everything fell apart.

Alex may have been immensely talented, but he was also arrogant and indolent. He enjoyed the wealth and fame that came with being a big-name reporter, but he never really cared for the hard work that went along with the job. Eventually Alex was caught fabricating quotes and plagiarizing the work of others. He was fired in disgrace, washed up as a legitimate journalist. Under different circumstances Alex might have issued a *mea culpa*, then written a tell-all memoir to cash in handsomely on his notoriety. But by this time Alex was deep into an expensive drug habit. Besides, he lacked the moral center to admit his actions had been wrong. He had just been doing what he needed to get ahead, and he was just unlucky enough to get caught.

After a few months in career freefall, Alex found work as a freelancer, writing for several slightly sleazy entertainment tabloids. It was a good match for him. Alex was still a superlative investigative reporter, and his infamy and complete lack of ethics made him ideal for the job of making actors, politicians, and sports stars look bad through concocted "facts," slanted stories, and out-of-context photos. Alex even

took up his old interest in photography again, just so he could garner his own photos of the celebrities he covered instead of having to buy them from the paparazzi.

Digging up dirt for the tabloids never quire paid enough, however, to finance Alex's lifestyle. He still expected five-star restaurants, the best dance clubs, high-priced call girls, and the finest alcohol and drugs. So Alex took on a second career, moonlighting as a low-level drug dealer, selling amphetamines, cocaine, ecstasy and the like to his club scene acquaintances. This "sideline" would soon led to an end for Alex's career as a toiling tabloid reporter, and gave rise to the Midnight Edition, blackmailer and extortionist

VITAL STATS: MIDNIGHT EDITION

Quote: "◀ELECTRONICALLY DISTORTED VOICE▶ HELLO. THIS IS THE MIDNIGHT EDITION. NOT FEELING QUITE YOURSELF, TONIGHT, ARE YOU? I'M RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT, I'M AFRAID. A WHOLE NEW IMAGE FOR YOU, DON'T YOU THINK? OH, YOU DON'T LIKE WHAT YOU SEE IN THE MIRROR? WELL EVERYTHING CAN BE CORRECTED...FOR THE RIGHT PRICE."

Real Name: Alexander Lane

Aliases: None

Occupation: Extortionist/tabloid reporter

Legal Status: United States citizen with misdemeanor criminal record for drug possession

Identity: Secret

Marital Status: Single

Known Relatives: Parents (Robert, Madeline), sisters (Elaine, Robin)

Affiliation: None

Base of Operations: Hollywood

Eye Color: Blue

Hair Color: Black

Height: 6'0

Weight: 145 lbs.

Distinguishing Marks: Often displays behavior consistent with abuse of amphetamines or cocaine

extraordinaire.

One of Alex's regular customers, a would-be screenwriter named Jackie Noir, had fallen behind on his cocaine bill. Alex was about to cut him off when Jackie made him an offer. A few years ago Jackie had inherited a box of antique bric-a-brac from his uncle Cyrus. The family stories had it that his uncle had been a masked mystery-man in the 1950s, some kind of occult detective or something like that, and Jackie knew Alex was interested in black magic and voodoo and that sort of thing. He asked if they could make a trade, a little coke for the box. Alex figured Jackie's story was probably a con-job, but was he was intrigued enough, and just high enough that evening, to agree to the trade.

When a date later that night ended early, with the young woman passed out in his bed after a frenzy of drug use and other debaucheries, Alex was bored enough to check out Jackie's box. Rummaging through various occult paraphernalia—black candles, crystal balls and the like—he came across an old fashioned camera and an assortment of lenses. The camera had an ornate, almost baroque appearance, adorned with numerous buttons and switches, and inscribed with what looked like Egyptian hieroglyphics. All the lenses were oddly tinted. Peering at his apartment through the camera's eye he noticed something truly strange: the twenty-something blonde girl passed out on his bed now appeared to be a heavy-set, jowly woman in her fifties. When he looked at her again without the camera, she was young and attractive, but through the camera she was aged and out of shape. Intrigued, Alex tried snapping a picture, but nothing seemed to happen. Frustrated, he started pushing buttons, but quickly bored of this and lay down to consider this

strange phenomenon. After about an hour had passed, he heard a whirring sound and turned to watch as the antique camera spit out a picture. Turning his head back to the woman beside him, he was stunned to find that his date now actually *was* fifty-something, a flabby middle-aged woman ridiculously attired in gaudy makeup and ill-fitting clothes.

Even in his intoxicated state Alex realized what had to have happened. The story Jackie had told him about the objects in the box had been true, the girl's transformation was proof of that! The picture he had taken had changed the woman physically, aged her thirty years in an instant, changing her to match the image in the photo. Curious about what would happen, Alex then burned the picture. She regained her youthful appearance rather than spontaneously combusting, which was a bit of a disappointment to Jackie, but only for a moment. Alex quickly



realized what he had stumbled upon, and that his ship had finally come in. He rudely awakened the young lady and ushered her out of the apartment, so he could start making plans.

Within no time, he was putting his

MIDNIGHT EDITION

PL 5

STR	-1	8	INT	+1	12
DEX	+1	13	WIS	-1	8
CON	+0	10	CHA	+2	14
TOUGHNESS			FORTITUDE		
+2			+3		
REFLEX			WILL		
+1			-1		

SKILLS

Bluff 8 (+10), Climb 2 (+1), Computer 1 (+2), Craft (artistic) 4 (+5), Diplomacy 2 (+4), Disable Device 4 (+5), Disguise 2 (+4), Gather Information 8 (+10), Investigate 8 (+9), Knowledge (current events) 1 (+2), Language 1 (Native English, Spanish), Notice 7 (+6), Profession (tabloid reporter) 4 (+5), Search 4 (+5), Sleight of Hand 2 (+3), Stealth 6 (+8)

FEATS

Artificer, Contacts, Equipment 2, Dodge Focus 2, Improved Defense, Ritualist

POWERS

Device 6 ("Magic Camera"), *Sorcery* (array): **Confuse 3** (*Extras*: Area – Explosion), **Illusion 3** (visual and auditory; *Extras*: Action; *Flaws*: Phantasms), **ESP 6** (visual; *Flaws*: Medium – cameras)

DEVICES

Magic Camera (array): **Transform 7** (different aspects of humanity, *Extras*: Duration – Continuous; *Flaws*: Action – Full Action); **Dazzle 7** (visual, magic; *Extras*: Area – Cone; *Flaws*: Range – Touch); **Super-Senses 4** (X-Ray Vision, blocked by magical wards or silver)

EQUIPMENT

Camera, Cell Phone, Laptop, Video Camera, Binoculars, Hold-out Pistol

DRAWBACKS

Power Loss (must gesture to use sorcery; Uncommon)

COMBAT

Attack +2, Grapple +1, Damage -1 (unarmed), +2 (hold-out pistol), Defense +4, +1 (flat-footed), Knockback -1, Initiative +1

TOTALS

Abilities 4 + Skills 16 (64 ranks) + Feats 8 + Powers 28 + Combat 8 + Saves 5 - Drawbacks 1 = 68 PP

camera to what seemed to be the most logical use: transforming rich attractive people into rich ugly ones, than blackmailing them to change them back. Leaving his tabloid job behind, Alex now takes embarrassing pictures only he sees, creating his own chronicle of human frailty—the Midnight Edition.

PERSONALITY

Alex is a textbook sociopath. He knows the difference between right and wrong, but believes the rules don't apply to a man of his ambition, intelligence, and style. Everything he does is justified in his own mind. He's selfish, shallow, and materialistic, with few interests beyond drugs, money, sex and occasional the occult. He has no qualms about lying or betraying anyone to serve his own interests.

APPEARANCE

Midnight Edition is 28 years-old, about six feet tall, whippet-thin and pale. He keeps his black hair slicked back and his bloodshot, deep blue eyes behind designer sunglasses. Alex is actually rather handsome, but over the years his face has gained that hard look cokeheads tend to pick up, and a sort of weaselly, untrustworthy expression set off by his constantly shifting gaze. He always seems to be in motion, face and body twitching restlessly. He wears expensive, trendy clothing, usually casual designer label pants, Italian-leather wingtip shoes, and custom-tailored suit jackets, all complimented with bright silk shirts and flashy ties. Whenever Alex is "working" he will be clutching the magic camera and his latest-model laptop. Alex is increasingly paranoid about either of these being taken away from him, the former for obvious reasons, and the latter because it is loaded with incriminating information, and never leaves either unattended, hiding them and locking them away whenever he is not using them.

POWERS AND TACTICS

The Midnight Edition's MO is simple. He stalks celebrities—Hollywood types exclusively now—maintaining his cover as a freelance tabloid reporter by occasionally filing stories on a mud-raking website. He snaps several candid photos with a regular camera to pass himself off as an ordinary snoop, then surreptitiously sneaks in one or two "special" pictures. He then tails his chosen target until he is sure the mark is alone and likely to remain indoors. Then he develops the magic picture, causing the individual in the photograph to undergo an unflattering transformation. After allowing himself a few moments to savor the thought of his victim's

embarrassment and despair, he places a phone call, introducing himself as the Midnight Edition, the “photographic artist” behind the victim’s unfortunate change. He then informs the victim that unless her or she wishes the change to become public, and permanent, a generous ransom will be forthcoming.

Alex has also occasionally used the camera to improve the looks of a few select “girlfriends,” upgrading them to near-supermodel status in return for certain favors such as drugs, sex, or a percentage of their future earnings. He ensures their silence by demonstrating his ability to strip away their good looks forever if they compromise him in any way. He knows he could make a mint simply by shopping his services out to the rich and famous, by keeping the Hollywood elite perpetually youthful and attractive, but Midnight Edition is too paranoid that someone would take his plaything away, and besides, he has a genuine mean streak. Alex Lane enjoys the humiliation he dishes out to the high and mighty.

The Midnight Edition has no other real superpowers and little skill in hand-to-hand combat. His abilities stem from two sources: the enchanted camera and his own minor magical skills. He has learned he can vary the transformations caused by the camera by switching the arrangement of the lenses, making a target older, fatter, thinner, younger, or whatever cosmetic change seems most devastating. Certain buttons also activate other features, such as the X-ray setting that allows him to take pictures through solid walls, or the flash button that generates near-blinding light. Formerly only a dilettante in the dark arts, the power evidenced by the camera spurred him to become a more serious student of the arcane world. While still little more than a novice, he has mastered a few simple tricks of illusion, misdirection, and prestidigitation. He has also learned to tap into some of the other mystic artifacts he found in the box, allowing him to cast minor curses and perform a few simple divination spells. He uses the latter to better select his future targets. The Midnight Edition still possesses considerable detective skills, and is an expert in reconnaissance and beating surveillance systems. Alex is careful when selecting his victims, making sure they are more likely to pay off and then move on than they are to seek retribution.

IN GAME

Usually, the Midnight Edition should inspire adventures of investigation, cat-and-mouse games between the heroes and the shadowy blackmailer. He is not much of a threat for a group of crime-fighters in direct combat, and has no heart for any sort of open

THE SECRET OF THE CAMERA



Unknown to him, the Midnight Edition’s magic camera operates on the same arcane principles as Radian’s legendary lantern (see page 59). The Tinkerer, an archvillain active in the 30’s and 40’s, who was among the then-heroic Lighthouse Keeper’s most persistent enemies, created the camera. The super-villain was once able to temporarily overcome the Lighthouse Keeper and briefly study the lantern, using what he learned to design and build the camera. The camera also carries a watered down version of the lantern’s curse, which partially explains Alex’s increasing anxiety and paranoia. The camera came into the possession of the occult detective Cyrus Noir, who passed it on to his nephew, Jackie, who in turn traded it to Alex Lane.

confrontation with the authorities. Despite adopting a colorful *nom de guerre*, Alex does not fancy himself a supervillain. His only goal is to get rich quietly through choice blackmail. He works carefully to cover his tracks, adventurers with superhuman abilities might have an edge tracking him down, but his paranoia insures they will not do so unnoticed.

Once the heroes begin to close in on the Midnight Edition, things can get a lot uglier. If he finds his activities drawing unwanted attention from the police—or worse yet, superheroes—he will first attempt to dig up dirt on them, hoping to “persuade” them to back off. Finding all the mistakes of one’s super-heroic career in an envelope on the porch—or worse, on the Internet—can give even the most powerful champions pause. Failing to discourage pursuers with his preferred tactics, Alex he will employ hired muscle—super-powered muscle if necessary. For example, Alex has provided the inhuman Troll with enough free drugs and women in recent months to earn a favor or two (see the entry on Troll, page 70).

A Surprise Twist in the Storyline: The Midnight Edition’s latest victim is an up-and-coming film actress named Veronica Mason, a runway model whose sudden popularity has led to million-dollar contracts for both movies and cosmetics commercials. Smelling a big payday, Midnight Edition has engaged in his usual MO, changing her from tall and slender to short and dumpy, and then demanding a fat ransom to restore her looks.

Her handlers were more than willing to fork over the cash Midnight Edition asked for, but Veronica has

stubbornly refused to pay, unwilling to cooperate with blackmail. She wants to call the police, but her agent and entourage have so far talked her out of this. Instead, her agent contacts the heroes and explains the situation. Obviously, this transformation is the work of some kind of super-human, so the agent feels that the heroes are better qualified to handle this matter than police. Besides, the LAPD aren't very good about keeping things out of the media. If further motivation is needed, the agent will offer a large sum of money, either for the PCs' own use or as a donation to their favorite charity. He can also guarantee them some excellent press if they handle the matter quietly.

The twist is Veronica Mason herself. Born Vera Meriwether, she was pushed into modeling by an overzealous stage-mother but never liked making a living by her looks. The transition to acting was welcome as a more meaningful way to express herself, but in the film world she is still treated like a commodity, and only gets helpless ingénue roles in soul-deadening big-budget hack-jobs. Now that her appearance is changed, she feels she can start over with a new life, maybe seeking some more fulfilling film work or retiring from the business altogether. Her agent, manager, accountant, and the other members of her entourage have other ideas of course; they want the gravy train to keep running. But Veronica will do all she can to prevent any ransom from being paid, and to interfere with the PCs' attempts to find the perpetrator behind her change. She will prove to be surprisingly persistent and resourceful in her efforts to thwart the heroes' investigation.

The Wrong Night: When he chose beautiful cover-model Lucy West as his next victim, the Midnight Edition thought this one would be a slam-dunk. Lucy often spent long hours alone at night at her home, a converted lighthouse just up the coast from L.A. The local paparazzi knew she usually spent the first hours after sundown standing alone on her balcony, staring wistfully out towards the sea. Taking the picture was easy, and when Alex developed his photo of the once buxom model as a skinny, emaciated wreck, he decided to ask for even more money than usual. But Lucy didn't pick up the phone when he called with his blackmail demand, even though Alex called more times than he would normally dare. When he went back to her home to snoop from a distance, he looked through her windows and saw the interior of the house completely destroyed, as though a raging animal had torn it apart. Investigating further, he found her front door broken into splinters and the house itself empty, except for a pile of Lucy's dead

bodyguards in the entryway. Terrified, the Midnight Edition suddenly remembered that he'd been meaning to visit Miami and caught the first flight out of town. He is frantically trying to decide whether to burn the picture or keep it as leverage in case someone comes after him.

What no one knew was that the most powerful of Earth's vampires, the Wallachian, had taken an aesthetic interest in Miss West's physical beauty and decided to make her one of his brides. He had been visiting her often for the past few months, feeding on her blood and preparing her to become one of the undead. The night Alex took Lucy's picture was the same night the Wallachian had intended to transform her into a vampire. When the vampire lord arrived, and found Lucy a withered, rail-thin hag, he went into a blood-crazed frenzy, destroying the interior of the house and slaughtering her security personnel. Some sorcerer had dared to curse a woman he claimed as his own!

Since that night, dozens of persons related to the occult—from actual sorcerers to astrologers and fake gypsy palm readers—have been attacked and drained of blood. The Wallachian has spirited Lucy away to a sanctuary in Mexico, while his vampiric servants tear through every person in L.A. who could have some knowledge of the mystic arts. Little suspecting a paparazzo with a magic camera, these servants are less concerned with investigation than they are with the wholesale bloodshed, believing that killing every occultist in the area will intimidate the foolish magician who cursed their master's bride into revealing himself or reversing the curse. Given the number of New Age aficionados in L.A. and the vampires' loose definition of who is an occultist, the PCs must intervene to prevent many, many more murders. Will they track down Midnight Edition, seek to confront the Wallachian directly, or find some other solution?

ENDGAME

Midnight Edition's scheme works way more often than it fails, but occasionally it does fail, because the victim won't play along. Depending on if and how the hooks above come into play, Alex has basically been lucky so far. If he's really smart, now that he's made his pot of money, he'll quit.

When he doesn't quit, it will most likely be because he has developed extravagant new lifestyle demands or put himself in debt to dangerous people. Sooner or later, one of his victims will be the significant other of a powerful hero or villain—they tend to date a lot of famous models or actresses—or worse yet,

the secret identity of someone powerful. Despite his cleverness and desire to keep a low-profile, the focused application of real superhuman resources to the Midnight Edition's operation is likely to put him out of business quickly, or leave him in the involuntary employ of someone much more ruthless than himself.

NETHER

Twenty years ago, Nina Kazantzakis was Atalanta, a little-known super-heroine. A blood descendant of the legendary Greek athlete Atalanta, Nina was able to wield an ancient relic that she dubbed the "Speed Scepter," an enchanted caduceus-staff said to belong to the mythological Greek god Hermes. With the scepter in hand she could defy the normal dictates of distance and time, allowing her to seemingly run and move many times faster than any normal human being.

Unfortunately, while her powers were considerable, Atalanta never made much of an impact as a superhero. She showed little creativity in using her powers, had no real flair for combat, and even wore a rather drab, lackluster costume. The rest of her life seemed to have stalled out as well. While her work as a nurse allowed her to help people in addition to paying the bills, she had been refused admittance to medical school several times. None of her romantic relationships ever quite worked out, she had few close friends and even her dog kept running away.

The one time where Atalanta really made a difference was when a vast other-dimensional entity called the Chronophage entered the universe and began devouring time itself, splintering the timeline. When assembling heroes to help defeat this threat, the Magister (see page 33) recruited Atalanta specifically, as her scepter gave her some immunity to the Chronophage's time-devouring powers. At a crucial point, the Magister gave Atalanta a powerful artifact, a mystic sword of flame, and told her to strike the very heart of the Chronophage.

Blade in hand, she ran faster than ever before, racing to the center of the Chronophage's vast being and striking the critical blow that allowed the Magister and other heroes to drive the creature out of reality. Yet in the resulting conflagration, she was apparently disintegrated by blasts of temporal energy. The Magister recovered the mystic sword he had lent her, but Atalanta was lost.

The next thing Nina remembers is appearing in the middle of a busy shopping mall during the holiday season. She was disoriented and began screaming and shouting out to passersby, desperate to find out what had happened. When mall security guards tried to apprehend her for accosting customers she tried to flee. She expected to take off at super-speed, but found that she could run no faster than a normal human being. Panicking at her lack of speed, she threw up her hands to ward the guards off. Suddenly, she found herself facing three children stumbling about in baggy clothes. The security guards had suddenly grown decades younger.

Making good her escape, Nina eventually made her way to her home-city. Once there, she was shocked to find that nearly two decades had passed. She realized she had somehow been displaced in time, but she was still alive, and if this was the sacrifice she had to make to save the world, then so be it. She began trying to contact anyone she could think of from her past to try and get her bearings, first her old super-hero friends, then her siblings, her parents, ex-boyfriends, anyone at all she could think of. The response was

always the same—no one remembered her at all.

Frantically she began searching for an answer about what had happened. Why did no one recognize her? Even after so many years, she should not have been completely forgotten. She'd saved the world, after all. She poured over newspaper and magazines stories about the crisis she had helped avert and there was no mention of her. She then checked telephone directories, computer library databases, even her old high-school yearbooks, but there was nothing. She had been

VITAL STATS: NETHER

Quote: "YOU'RE OUT OF TIME — BUT THEN AGAIN, SO AM I."

Real Name: Nina Kazantzakis

Aliases: Formerly Atalanta

Occupation: Mercenary

Legal Status: None

Dual Identity: Secret. No record currently exists of Nina Kazantzakis

Marital Status: Single

Known Relatives: None in current time-line

Affiliation: None

Base of Operations: Mobile

Age: 33

Eye Color: Brown

Hair Color: Black

Height: 5'2"

Weight: 120 lbs.

Distinguishing Marks: Tends to gain and lose weight frequently, fluctuating by up to twenty pounds at any given time

erased from time.

In this new reality Atalanta had never existed, and neither had Nina Kazantzakis. She was a complete stranger even to those who had once been her closest friends, and even her own memories of her life were hazy, dream-like, as if her prior life had never been real at all. But worst of all was the fact that her one great triumph, saving the entire universe from destruction, was completely forgotten. Everyone believed her part had instead been played by several other heroes. The public seemed to have only a dim recollection of the Chronophage anyway, as if somehow everyone's memories had been clouded. Those she tried to convince otherwise thought she was a madwoman. She had sacrificed everything that makes a human being who they are, and no one would ever remember or care.

For months Nina struggled to survive on the streets with no friends, no money, and no resources. She slept in shelters and in the streets. The magic of her scepter was completely gone. Only after long months did Nina come to understand that she had gained powers of her own. The incident at the mall had been no fluke—she could now partially manipulate time, making time flow faster,

slower, or even run in reverse. She found opportunities to practice her new abilities several times on the streets, when others tried to rob or assault her. All who tried lived to regret it.

At first, Nina merely used her new powers to get out off the shelter and secure living arrangements, but then she began to grow embittered. She stewed in the disappointment, pain and regret engendered by her fate until it all sent her over the edge into nihilistic anger and despair. She had become a nothing, a zero, but that didn't mean her life was over, and she decided to make every minute of her rebooted life count. Heroism had brought her nothing but misery, so she chose to focus on helping herself instead of helping

others.

Nina decided her new path to happiness would be paved with money and excess.

She began offering her services as a super-powered enforcer to the criminal underworld, willing to take on nearly any job, big or small. A minor demonstration of her newfound time-powers was all it took to convince most potential employers of her worth. Under her new name, Nether, Nina proved quite effective, aging her assigned targets to the point of debilitation or regressing them to early childhood. Within a few months she had no shortage of work. Since then, she has effectively ended the careers of at least three super-heroes and, as a special job, left two double-crossing super-villains out of synch with normal time. She quickly established a reputation among the underworld set as an efficient, professional gun-



for-hire who never allows any personal motives or vendettas to interfere with business.

One such employer, the arms dealer known simply as Merchant, compensated her with an Ambient Energy Rifle, a powerful high-tech weapon that has made her even more deadly and effective. Today, Nether lives in the lap of luxury, her indulgent lifestyle maintained by the high fees she demands for her services. But in her quiet moments, she is not sure whether she is proud or sad that she is far more successful as a villain for hire than she ever was as a heroine.

PERSONALITY

Depressed and disillusioned, the Nether has only hazy memories of her old life, but she distinctly remembers that despite her best efforts, she never felt that she was appreciated or respected by her peers—and now she has been completely forgotten by even her former friends and family members. She retains only shreds of her former moral code, believing nothing she does ultimately matters. Everything can be wiped out in the blink of an eye, so why try to make a difference in the world? Better simply to indulge your own impulses and enjoy existence while it lasts. Her sensibilities will not allow her to commit murder or participate in real atrocities, but otherwise she will work for nearly anyone who can pay her considerable price, from drug-cartel kingpins to criminal masterminds. She would only draw the line at doing business with those who are truly depraved: mass murderers, psychopaths, or sexual predators. She actually prefers to go after other criminals, usually out of control super villains or rogue gang lords that someone wants disposed of, but employers are a lot more likely to send her after heroes. Nether is resigned to this, and figures this is simply the hand that fate has dealt her.

APPEARANCE

Nether is a short (5'2"), well-built Greek-American woman with shoulder length black hair and brown eyes. She is moderately attractive, but generally wears an angry, brooding expression, smiling only in smug satisfaction when she has disposed of a target. She dresses in garb appropriate for whatever target she's going up against, whether that means camouflage gear or Kevlar body armor. The Speed Scepter and Ambient Energy Rifle are never far from her grasp.

POWERS AND TACTICS

Nether can manipulate temporal energies to a limited extent, allowing her to control the flow of time around other people and objects. Her powers

NETHER

PL 13

STR

+1

12

DEX

+4

18

CON

+3

16

INT

+1

12

WIS

+1

12

CHA

+1

12

TOUGHNESS

+7/+3*

FORTITUDE

+6

REFLEX

+10

WILL

+7

*without armor

SKILLS

Acrobatics 2 (+6), Bluff 4 (+5), Diplomacy 4 (+5), Gather Information 6 (+7), Investigate 3 (+4), Knowledge (history) 1 (+2), Knowledge (streetwise) 4 (+5), Notice 8 (+9), Search 4 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+5), Stealth 8 (+12)

FEATS

Defensive Attack, Diehard, Dodge Focus 5, Elusive Target, Equipment 2, Improved Defense, Improved Initiative 2, Instant Up, Precise Shot

POWERS

Device 7 ("Ambient Energy Rifle"), **Device 2** ("Speed Scepter"), **Transform 12** ("Time Manipulation", anything; *Extras*: Duration – Continuous; *Flaws*: Cannot Destroy or Eliminate a Living Being from Time)

DEVICES

Ambient Energy Rifle: Improved Aim, **Nemesis 4**, *Speed Scepter* (array): **Concealment 8** (all visual, all auditory, all olfactory; *Flaws*: Blending); **Super-Senses 8** (Temporal Awareness, Extended 3 [normal sight], Precognition [*Flaws*: Uncontrolled], Time Sense)

EQUIPMENT

Cell Phone, Laptop, Binoculars, Camo Clothing, GPS Receiver, Tactical vest

COMBAT

Attack +12, Grapple +13, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +14, +5 (flat-footed), Knockback –3, Initiative +12

TOTALS

Abilities 22 + Skills 12 (48 ranks) + Feats 14 + Powers 99 + Combat 44 + Saves 13 = 188 PP

THE RED MONK

**Red Monk (PL 15)****Str 18, Dex 22, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 10****Skills:** Acrobatics 10 (+16), Concentration 10 (+12), Escape Artist 10 (+15), Intimidate 10 (+10), Notice 8 (+10), Search 6 (+6), Sense Motive 8 (+10), Stealth 10 (+16)**Feats:** Accurate Attack, Acrobatic Bluff, Assessment, Blind-Fight, Chokehold, Critical Strike, Defensive Attack, Defensive Roll 10, Elusive Target, Grappling Finesse, Improved Defense, Improved Disarm, Improved Grab, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative 2, Improved Sunder, Improved Throw, Improved Trip, Instant Up, Power Attack, Prone Fighting, Redirect, Stunning Attack, Takedown Attack 2, Trance, Uncanny Dodge**Powers: Strike 14** ("Dim Mak", *Power Feats:* Incurable; *Extras:* Linked to Paralyze, Penetrating),**Paralyze 14** (*Power Feats:* Incurable; *Extras:* Linked to Strike; *Flaws:* Only Usable with Strike)**Combat:** Attack +16, Grapple +20, Damage +4 (unarmed), +14 (strike), Defense +14, Knockback -6, Initiative +14**Saving Throws:** Toughness +13, +3 (flat-footed), Fortitude +8, Reflex +13, Will +14**Totals:** Abilities 31 + Skills 18 (72 ranks) + Feats 37 + Powers 72 + Combat 58 + Saves 16 = 232 PP

can cause a target to rapidly age, grow younger, shift outside of normal time, or cease moving through time altogether, putting the target in permanent stasis. These effects normally last until Nether chooses to reverse them, though other means to negate her temporal distortions may certainly exist (whether arcane or super-scientific is up to the GM). Nether cannot yet precisely control her powers—their exact effect on a living being is always a bit unpredictable. So far, however, Nether has never aged anyone to death nor has she caused a target to regress into non-existence. Whether she can use her powers against living beings in such a lethal fashion is still unknown. Against unliving targets she has exhibited more control, using her rapid-aging powers to crumble stone walls and rust weapons into uselessness.

A bit of magic still resides in the magical staff Nether used as Atalanta. While holding the former Speed Scepter, Nether can extend her perceptions across great distances, ignoring any intervening barriers, and even receive cryptic glimpses of the near-future. She can also use the staff to bend the fabric of space-time around herself, masking her presence from others.

The Ambient Energy Rifle can project a wide selection of energy forms, everything from muscle-weakening enervator beams to chilling hell-frost rays. The weapon is semi-sentient and can automatically recalibrate itself to the proper setting to deal with any single target. The rifle never needs to be recharged. As its name implies, it soaks up residual energies from its surroundings continuously. It can, however, be neutralized by certain darkness effects and energy-suppressing powers. At any given time, Nether may also be armed with more conventional weapons and equipment or even other magical devices; her occupation gives her access to all sorts of unusual resources.

IN GAME

Due to her general lack of moral qualms and willingness to work for all but the most loathsome villains, Nether can serve a variety of functions in your game. She could be contracted to take out one or more of the PCs by a frightened or vengeful opponent, hired to protect a wealthy crime-boss, or sent to deal with a powerful public official or popular media personality. She tends to work alone, but this is not a hard and fast rule, and she would be of great tactical value on any super-villain team. She prefers to take out criminals, so the heroes might even find her an inadvertent ally on some missions, but unless they work hard to befriend her, she will not let past associations stop her from doing what it takes to complete a mission.

Red Monk Is Back: A small-time crime boss named Andrea Andolini hired Nether to put a few of her rivals out of commission, then stiffed Nether on the agreed fee, attempting to set her up instead by tipping off a group of heroes to her activities. Nether escaped the trap and swore that Andolini would pay for her betrayal. To that end, Nether has issued an ultimatum: Andolini will either pony up ten million dollars in protection money or Nether will release a villain known as Red Monk from the temporal stasis she put him in months ago back. Red Monk, so-named for blood-red hood he wore, was once a much-feared super-assassin, a martial artist of inhuman ability who carved out a small criminal empire through sheer brutality and fear. Red Monk was so murderous and violent that the other crime lords of the day agreed to hire Nether to remove him from the picture.

Andolini, in a tenuous spot in those days as one the Mafia's few female bosses, acted as the go-between for the syndicates, contacting Nether on their behalf

to arrange the hit. In return, she was rewarded with much of Red Monk's old territory to run as her own after he was taken out of commission. She knows that once awakened, Red Monk's first priority will be reclaiming everything that was formerly his, and Andolini also knows she has no chance of surviving the carnage Red Monk will unleash. Nether realizes that Red Monk will eventually come after her too, but she feels confident that she'll be able to deal with him—after all, she dealt with him once already.

Andolini doesn't have ten million dollars on hand, so in desperation she goes to the PCs, begging for their help. Andolini explains that unless the heroes stop Nether from releasing Red Monk, she's as good as dead. She's willing to cop to some of her lesser crimes and do prison time in exchange for the PCs' help, but knows Red Monk will come for her even if the PCs put her behind bars. Andolini doesn't know where Red Monk's inert body is, only that Nether said she had it stashed someplace secure. If the PCs fail to track down Nether in time to prevent her from reviving him, they have to contend with Red Monk as well, and will find him to be a very formidable foe indeed (see sidebar). Red Monk retained a degree of awareness even in stasis, and his thoughts were of nothing but exacting cold-blooded revenge on those responsible for his imprisonment. He will initially attempt simply to escape and get his bearings, but will eventually go after Andolini, Nether, the other crime lords, and any heroes unfortunate enough to get in his way.

Atalanta Redux: A new heroine makes her debut in the heroes' hometown: Atalanta, the Mistress of Momentum! Though barely out of her teens, Atalanta displays amazing control and creativity, using her super-speed in all sorts of clever ways. She quickly establishes her reputation, putting away several experienced super-villains within weeks of her first appearance. Unbeknownst to anyone, even Atalanta, she has had some help along the way. Nether has been surreptitiously assisting her young namesake, helping her to take down the villains while allowing Atalanta to take all the credit. Nether doesn't really know why she's helping her successor. Maybe it's because she always wanted Atalanta to be a respected name among superheroes, maybe out of foolish sentimentality, or maybe a bit of both.

Unfortunately, sentimentality turns to envy and anger when Atalanta II receives an offer to join a renowned national super-team, a group that rejected Nether when she was still Atalanta in the original timeline. Nether starts to see the new Atalanta as just another way the universe taunts her, giving someone

else her old role and letting her garner glory and adulation while Nina's own heroic deeds are forever forgotten. Nether determines to put a permanent end to the upstart's career. Atalanta narrowly avoids Nether's time-warping touch on several occasions, but the villain stalks her relentlessly. Unable to shake her pursuer even after a cross-country run, she turns up on the PCs' doorstep, exhausted and pleading for aid. Can they prevent her from ending up back in diapers or as a resident in a retirement community?

What Nether is not aware of is that this new Atalanta is actually an alternate version of herself. In the rebuilt timeline, her parents met and married about a decade later than they had in the original, but they still had a daughter whom they named Nina Kazantzakis, a genetic double for Nether. This version of Nina Kazantzakis received her powers when she befriended an extra-dimensional alien who was briefly stranded in the Earth continuum. The planar traveler rewarded her with the Medallion of Momentum, a device which allows the wearer to control kinetic energy and inertia. Despite the ten year age difference, Nether will recognize her younger "sibling" if Atalanta is ever unmasked (she wears a hood and domino mask to conceal her features). Her reaction to Atalanta's true identity is up to the GM. If positive, it could be a big step in Nether's Endgame scenario (see below).

ENDGAME

Despite her great bitterness and self-serving philosophy, Nina always wanted to be a hero. Her streak of failures in that regard ended in one great triumph, but when that triumph was erased from time, along with the rest of her life, it all just became too painful. That pain is what keeps her from using her powers in the name of good, and it is a desire to suppress that pain which has led her to bury it beneath selfish pleasure.

The problem is Nina is not really a hedonist. She has never had a taste for drugs or excessive drinking. She likes nice things, and has a gorgeous home and expensive clothes, but really doesn't need much more than that. Money and the luxuries that it can buy will never truly erase the pain. The only time she really forgets the torment of it all is when she is in pursuit of an enemy, and she takes job after job, feeling most alive when taking down criminals—in short, Nina still wants to be a hero.

However, she is so tied up in her own bitterness that she cannot admit this to herself. Her selfishness is really a way of punishing the universe for what it has done to her. She can't or won't confront the

truth about herself unless outside circumstances intervene.

One possibility is the PCs. Comic books are full of villains or anti-heroes who end up befriending a team of heroes and joining them, and this is a possibility for Nether, though it would be a long and difficult process. The heroes would, first and foremost, have to earn Nina's trust to the point where she tells them her story, and they would have to prove to Nina that they believe her. When a group of heroes recognizes that Atalanta really did save the world from the Chronophage all those years ago, Nina is thrilled—finally someone understands what she sacrificed, what she accomplished. But that is only the first step. The second is that the heroes must demonstrate their respect and supportiveness to Nina. They must comprehend—and help Nina to comprehend—that she is much better at fighting the good fight now than she was before, because she has actually become very adept at taking down super-villains. Only if she truly believes that she'll be good at super-heroism this time around will Nina attempt it, using her time powers as part of a crime-fighting team.

Another possibility is the Magister. Of all the people in the world, only he remembers Atalanta's brave sacrifice, but he believes she was destroyed in her attack on the Chronophage. Nether's bizarre status as a woman out of time keeps even the Magister's powerful divinations from detecting her presence in the reassembled time-line. If he knew she were alive, he would be willing to devote a small amount of his precious time to helping her in repayment for her bravery, perhaps restoring other heroes' memories of Atalanta and setting the record straight about who it was who struck the critical blow against the Chronophage. In any case, the recognition in the crime-fighting community, which the Magister can provide, would also help Nina rediscover the hero within.

THE PRIME-MORTAL

This Prime-Mortal's origins begin countless eons ago, in a tiny plane of existence, one much smaller than our own universe yet still unimaginably vast. Three cosmic beings, each an omnipotent deity by mortal standards, had emerged from the energies of this plane; the two elder, more potent presences viewed their younger "sibling" with a degree of disdain and contempt. After billions of years, the elders began to create life in an attempt to ease their eternal boredom, bringing into being a series of odd worlds and populating these spheres with strange, baroque life-forms. After creating them, however, the two elders found themselves uncertain what the point had been. Did they want these creatures to grow more intelligent, to perhaps worship them, or did they just want to observe them without any further interaction? Would mortal life provide any new insights into their own tired existences, or merely a distraction from their apathetic, endless omnipotence? They had created sentient beings, but they didn't know what to do with them.

When the life-forms became intelligent, seeking to

explore and understand the worlds around them, their awakened minds attracted the attention of the third entity. From the depths of the plane, where it roiled in a purposeless, hibernation-like existence, the youngest of the beings was called to these new entities like a moth to a flame. Life had emerged in many forms across the worlds the elder beings had created, and the most populated of these worlds soon received a visit from the third most powerful force in their universe.

The third entity could see and hear everything that this world's beings thought, felt or experienced. It knew their triumphs and downfalls, their cruelties and compassions, and their constant search for knowledge and the meaning of their own

VITAL STATS: THE PRIME-MORTAL

Quote: "AH, THE HUMAN RACE. SO NOBLE IN POTENTIAL, SO HOPEFUL IN SPIRIT, SO WOEFULLY CORRUPTIBLE IN NATURE. IF YOU DIDN'T EXIST, I WOULD HAVE TO INVENT YOU, JUST FOR THE PLEASURE OF DESTROYING YOU AGAIN."

Real Name: None

Aliases: The Eternal Corrupter, Ahriman, the Black Pharaoh, the Crawling Chaos, Apollyon, the Nightmare Thing From Beyond, the Black Man, the Haunter of the Dark, the Thing in the Yellow Mask

Occupation: Corrupter of men, sower of chaos, embodiment of evil

Legal Status: None

Dual Identity: Existence not publicly known

Marital Status: None

Known Relatives: None

Affiliation: None

Base of Operations: Mobile (occasionally the pocket dimension Alar, the Woeful City)

Age: Incalculable

Eye Color: Variable

Hair Color: Variable

Height: Variable

Weight: Variable

Distinguishing Marks: Presence makes domestic and wild animals uneasy. Small insects and plants die upon touching the Prime-Mortal

existence. It took a long moment to savor it all, millennia by our reckoning, and then, in sudden rush of what can only be described as joy, destroyed that world. Nothing in the third entity's existence had ever been so satisfying as to experience all these crude beings' attempts to make sense of their lives, and then to suddenly end every one of those lives for no reason at all. For the first time in all eternity, one of the entities had found something to be—for lack of a better word—funny.

It took the other entities many ages to realize that they cared. By that time, the third entity had enjoyed the destruction of many such worlds. Each time, the entity took more time with its pursuits, sometimes millions of years, enjoying the destruction more and more. When the elder entities told their sibling to stop, the third entity was confused for a picosecond, then realized it was tired of the others. The third entity tried to destroy them, unsure if such a thing could be done. It turned out that, in their omnipotence, any one of the entities could have destroyed the others at any time, simply by wishing it. The third entity was merely the first to realize this fact. Its elders now destroyed, the entity was free to further perfect annihilating life in more and more enjoyable ways.

A billion years later, having destroyed all life in its plane, the entity tried to think of new entertainments. It created life of its own, but somehow could not create creatures that felt and yearned and sought meaning the way the first ones had. The created beings reflected

their maker, and could not be made to feel anything about life beyond their creator's own existential apathy. As a result, they were too loathsome and hateful of the worlds they inhabited to make their extermination anything more than a chore.

The entity would have remained trapped by this dilemma forever if not for the actions of a certain alien species in our universe. Dwelling near the star Aldebaran, their dimensional explanations were just beginning to bear fruit. In a great experiment which drew upon all of their civilizations resources, they punched through the walls between dimensions and reached the entity's own desolate plane. Thankfully, they could only keep the portal

between worlds open for a fraction of second, but that brief opening was long enough for a tiny fraction of the entity to reach our own universe.

The piece of the entity that slipped through was a relatively negligible fragment, a mere sliver of the all-powerful entity that had despoiled its own plane. Nevertheless, it was omnipotent by our standards and immediately attained an independent existence. Within seconds of becoming self-aware, this sliver-entity destroyed the



THE PRIME-MORTAL

PL 20

STR	+10	30	INT	+5	20
DEX	+3	16	WIS	+7	24
CON	+10	30	CHA	+5	20

TOUGHNESS	FORTITUDE	REFLEX	WILL
+20	+20	+8	+17

SKILLS

Concentration 10 (+17), Diplomacy 20 (+25), Intimidate 20 (+25), Knowledge (arcane lore) 20 (+25), Notice 16 (+23), Sense Motive 10 (+17).

FEATS

All-out Attack, Blind-Fight, Fast Overrun, Fearsome Presence 3, Improved Grab, Improved Initiative 2, Improved Overrun, Power Attack, Prone Fighting, Takedown Attack 2.

POWERS

Astral Form 17 (Power Feats: Dimensional), **Comprehend 5** (languages, plants), **Immunity 9** (life support), **Mind Shield 20** (Extras: Linked to Confuse), **Confuse 10** (Extras: Action – Reaction; Flaws: Only Usable Against the User of a Mental Power that Fails to Penetrate Mind Shield), **Mind Reading 8**, **Morph 8** (humanoids; +40 to Disguise; Flaws: Only Usable on Possessed Bodies), **Nauseate 16**, **Nemesis 12**, **Possession 20** (Extras: Retains Powers with Physical Effects; Flaws: Target Must be Willing), **Protection 10** (Extras: Impervious), **Regeneration 16** (Unconscious 3, Disabled 7, Ability Damage 6; Power Feats: Persistent, Regrowth), **Summon 6** (“Batrachian Hybrids”; Power Feats: Progression 4; Extras: Fanatical, Horde), **Super-Movement 3** (Dimensional Movement, Power Feats: Progression 8), **Super-Senses 7** (Detect Magic [Ranged, Extended], Divine Awareness, Low-Light Vision, Scent, Ultravision), **Super-Strength 10**, **Telepathy 10** (Power Feats: Selective; Extras: Area – Burst), **Movement (array): Flight 5; Speed 5; Swimming 7**

COMBAT

Attack +15, Grapple +35, Damage +10 (unarmed), Defense +15, Knockback –18, Initiative +11

TOTALS

Abilities 80 + Skills 24 (96 ranks) + Feats 14 + Powers 545 + Combat 60 + Saves 25 = 747 PP

planet on which the experiment had taken place. It soon regretted failing to savor the destruction properly, but in the echoes of its victims' last thoughts it had heard cause for new hope: this species controlled an interplanetary empire, and were spread across multiple worlds. Having never destroyed such a widespread life-form before, the entity gleefully set about observing its new prey. It experimented with new techniques, manipulating the species into assisting with their own destruction, and within 10,000 years had reduced them to a handful of survivors whom it sought to destroy one by one.

But a wily sorcerer-scientist of this species managed to find a way to fight back. This sorcerer recreated the dimensional experiment that had brought the sliver-entity into this universe, yet managed to make this second dimensional rift only work one way: things could pass from our universe into that one, but not vice-versa. As soon as the portal began to open, the sliver-entity felt a pull, as its energies naturally moved to reunite with its original “parent” being. For the first time in its existence, the sliver-entity felt fear, becoming terrified at the prospect of returning to a plane where it would never again know the joy of exterminating independent sentient life. It instinctively fled, dissipating itself into sub-atomic particles and launching itself across the universe at nearly the speed of light.

In this dissipated state, the sliver-entity was like a handful of dust tossed to the winds, with no planned destination, its trajectory subject to even the weakest of occult forces. Many of these insubstantial motes had reached the vicinity of our own solar system when they felt another pull, this one a call to the planet Earth.

In the Paleolithic Age, when mankind had just completed its evolution into what we think of as modern man, a tribe known as the Tcho existed on a vast plateau near the Himalayas. A shaman of the Tcho had been exiled from the tribe for crimes against his own people, and he used his crude understanding of the mystic arts to seek vengeance, summoning a demon into his own flesh. The shaman believed that once the demon had possessed him, it would use his body to destroy the tribe, and all would die fearing the shaman and bitterly regretting his banishment. But the shaman had not only summoned a far more powerful demon than he had intended, but had accidentally called the sliver-entity into his body as well.

Never having truly inhabited flesh before, those pieces of the entity that had entered the shaman knew instinctively that they were safe there, and the reawakened sliver-entity summoned the other

particles of itself to this new home. However, it had possessed the shaman at the same time as the demon—the powerful Archduke of Hell called Apollyon—and there was brief struggle for control. Brief because the entity took a few moments to even realize that a struggle was taking place, and that control of this new body's nervous system was at stake. When it recognized what was happening, the not-yet complete entity simply replaced the missing pieces of itself with the energies of Apollyon, ending the conflict and effectively making the demon a part of itself. This was another new experience, as the entity had often destroyed other beings, but never consumed them in this way, and it found its new part-demonic consciousness nearly as interesting as its new body. For days it lay there, experiencing actual sensory input and finite consciousness as it never truly had before, not bothering to move, and then it noticed that there was another, far weaker consciousness in the body also.

The shaman's soul had slept within the body all that time, and when the sliver-entity realized this it consumed this too into itself. The human soul, while lacking in power, was even more fascinating than the demon. Humans were unique in the sliver-entity's experience; this creature had been willing to lose control its own body just to hurt others of its species. This potential for self-destruction and hatred was unparalleled among the previous species the sliver-entity had exterminated. What could be more enjoyable than inciting these hopeful, yearning, and innately compassionate life-forms into following their own instinct to destroy themselves and those around them? Nothing could bring him greater happiness; the entity was practically in love with the human race, for nothing else could suffer so exquisitely.

Even greater sources of joy now came to the entity's attention. In consuming the demon and the human, it had linked itself to them inextricably; it no longer possessed mere consciousness, but also a soul. The entity was both stronger and weaker than it had been, for it had gained true independence from its godlike other-dimensional parent, but now had a theoretically finite existence. It could *die*.

While its sheer power made the entity's destruction unlikely, the idea of actual mortality made the entity's understanding of its victims' fears all the more real. Destroying life has been only an idle game before, to fill the empty hours of immortality, but now that game had real stakes. The possibility of an ending to this existence made it even sweeter, yet the entity still had all the advantage over its prey, as the understanding of this universe's cosmology gained from the demon made it clear that no other physical being could ever

match the entity's power. While theoretically mortal itself, the entity was the most powerful mortal that could possibly exist in this reality. The Prime-Mortal had been born into the world of man.

The Prime-Mortal used its assimilated memories to do what the shaman's pride prevented him from doing, making peace with the Tcho elders and rejoining the tribe. The Prime-Mortal was loyal to the Tcho and made great contributions to their lives, wanting to experience all the best things their existence could offer and make their lives that much sweeter before taking it all away. It began to think of itself as a "he," immersing himself in the human experience so he could fully appreciate what he obliterated. After a decade, the Prime-Mortal manipulated the Tcho into a series of bloody tribal wars that destroyed their way of life and inflicted terrible suffering on those around them. In the end, he even let some live, reshaping the bodies of the cruelest survivors and allowing them to breed, creating his own tribe of fallen inhuman warriors who served him for generations—it is said a handful of their descendants serve him to this day.

The human race has been all the Prime-Mortal could have hoped for and more. At times he has perpetrated some of the worst horrors in human history, while at other times humans have pleasantly astonished him by inventing even greater atrocities without any help at all. The Prime-Mortal has led wise, benevolent kings down the path of tyranny, brought pestilence and plague to lay nations low, and caused whole cultures to collapse.

Shortly after the destruction of the Tcho, the Prime-Mortal spent some centuries in a nearby pocket dimension, reshaping his fragile human body into a vast and powerful tentacled horror that instinctively defends itself even when the Prime-Mortal's soul is not present in it. Usually, the Prime-Mortal travels our world as a disembodied spirit, possessing and reshaping new bodies when necessary to facilitate greater and more painful acts of destruction upon human beings.

Each new era of history offers him new opportunities. He helped engineer the destruction of fabled Atlantis, advised the bastard Mordred in breaking the Round Table and bringing about the fall of Camelot, continually coaxed the leaders of Europe into murderous Crusades, inspired Genghis Khan to set back Middle Eastern learning and culture centuries by destroying the ancient Persian cities of Rey and Tus, shepherded the Wallachian called the Impaler on the path to genocide and even greater horrors, and all the while managed to blame everything on the Gypsies, Jews or another group of outsiders. And every century gets better.

Only one human being has ever really been an obstacle to the Prime-Mortal's plans, and that human was repaid with a terrible vengeance. After being thwarted by the Magister in his attempt to throw civilization into turmoil by corrupting the very concept of language, the Prime-Mortal took revenge by slaying Cassilda, an aristocratic Spanish beauty who was the only woman the Arch-Adept ever truly loved. The Prime-Mortal posed as an elderly traveling peddler, a dealer in charms and potions. He then befriended Cassilda while her beloved was away in another dimension, listening to her loneliness and longings while encouraging her insecurities. Finally he gave her a tiny hourglass carved from black crystal, claiming it was a charm that would ensure that her lover would remain true to her for the rest of her life; this proved perversely true, as the cursed hourglass aged the woman to senescence in days. The Magister returned just in time to embrace his now venerable wife one last time before she perished, collapsing into dust. That day, the Magister swore an oath to destroy the Prime-Mortal at all costs, but though the two have come into conflict many times over the years, the Magister has never figured out a way to destroy this omnipotent foe.

The 20th Century turned out to be Prime-Mortal's most fruitful era. The Prime-Mortal was one of the first to sense the potential of fatherless boy in Germany, and he did nothing more than help shield the boy's existence from the visions of the world's oracles, preventing any attempts to intervene in the youth's destiny. Later, as Germany's armies marched across Europe, the Prime-Mortal watched with pride from Japan, where he was prompting terrible atrocities in the occupation of China. As always, the human race was exceeding his expectations. Then, something happened that no one had foreseen: masked heroes began to emerge. The Prime-Mortal had considered those who had existed before World War II mere aberrations, but when these heroes proved to be a force in world events, the Prime-Mortal turned his attentions to them. That few heroes ever actually made any real difference in aiding the Allies was in large part due to the Prime-Mortal's manipulations, and he can also take credit for the fact that so many of their careers ended not long after the war. When more masked heroes emerged in the 60's, the Prime-Mortal narrowed his focus, and since that time devotes most of his energies to corrupting superhumans and other masked champions.

Never before have so many humans with such noble intentions possessed so much power and potential to truly change their world. Corrupting that potential has been the Prime-Mortal's most

profound joy. The Prime-Mortal convinces brilliant scientists not to share their miraculous inventions with the common man, instills paranoia that makes people and their governments distrust even the most forthright superhuman champions, and empowers small-time criminals to distract powerful heroes from intervening in humanitarian disasters. But his most delicious acts of cruelty are convincing would-be heroes to fight, destroy one another, or harm friends and family members. Certain rare heroes manage to resist the Prime-Mortal's manipulations, and he resents this bitterly, occasionally destroying those heroes outright. More often, however, he turns their allies and loved ones against them or helps a hated villain to gain an edge. Always, he keeps a low profile, just in case one or more of the deities the humans pray to turn out to be real. Though ageless, the Prime-Mortal is mortal, after all, and while this makes his game far more pleasurable, he has no intention of letting the game end any time soon. He therefore avoids religious buildings and so-called "holy ground," so as not to evoke the ire of any gods or other higher beings; in all his eons of life, the Prime-Mortal has never once fought a fair fight, and he certainly doesn't intend to start now.

PERSONALITY

Evil beyond human comprehension, the Eternal Corruptor exists to spread despair, betrayal, misery, and ultimately destruction. Wherever the Prime-Mortal walks, animals sicken and plants wither in his path. The soil he treads on grows barren, unable to support life. The Prime-Mortal works constantly to tempt others into depravity and evil, transforming friends into bitter enemies, pitting brother against brother, turning mothers against their own children. In the modern day, the Prime-Mortal especially delights in bringing down heroes, turning them to the side of darkness. Acting through a mortal agent, the mysterious "Fixer," the Prime-Mortal transformed the ex-heroine Annabelle Astounding into the murderous Armageddon Girl and bequeathed a cursed magic lantern to an earnest young hero named Radian.

The Prime-Mortal often acts a sort of obscene genie, gleefully fulfilling the grandest of desires, but granting with each wish a host of horrible consequences. The Prime-Mortal is always willing to strike a deal, but any contract entered into with the fiend will soon prove to be no bargain at all for the one who struck it. The Prime-Mortal likes to boast that he has never had to coerce anyone into accepting one of his offers: human anger, greed, and stupidity are more than

sufficient to assure a steady stream of clients.

Ironically, the vile essence the Prime-Mortal absorbed from the demon prince Apollyon thousands of years ago actually makes him less prone to acts of wholesale slaughter and devastation. The streak of sadism he acquired greatly increased his preference for the slow, agonizing death of the human spirit over the relatively quick demise of mortal flesh. This is fortunate, as otherwise it is likely The Nightmare Thing From Beyond would have already destroyed the world, if not our entire universe, despite the best efforts of the Magister and the other mystic Powers of Good. Consequently, the perverted wishes the creature grants never result in the immediate demise of the wisher, but instead lead the individual down a path of abasement and self-destruction.

Likewise, the Prime-Mortal's schemes might result in the deaths of thousands or even millions, but not actual worldwide apocalypse; while he does plan to destroy the world at some future date, he plans on exacting every drop of suffering he can before doing so. Besides, humanity seems to be doing a fine job of bringing about its' own end. While the end of the Cold War and the much-decreased probability of a nuclear holocaust greatly disappointed to him, Prime-Mortal sees fine possibilities in the emerging sciences of genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, and nanotechnology. With the resurgence of religious fundamentalism and intolerance—evils that even the Prime-Mortal thought had played themselves out—and the resulting acts of terrorism and war, the Eternal Corruptor has high hopes for the current century. While the great human suffering and sheer carnage of the 20th Century may have made it the Prime-Mortal's favorite, he expects even better things from the 21st.

APPEARANCE

The Prime-Mortal can cause the bodies he possesses to assume any form, but usually chooses to adopt the guise of a male human. This is a mere preference, as the creature is entirely capable of taking on a female aspect, and has done so many times in the past, when it offered him an advantage. The Prime-Mortal does not realize it, but he prefers a male human body because of a sense identity left over from the shaman whose body he first possessed, since scraps of that consciousness are still a part him. Even when outside of a body, the Prime-Mortal can make himself visible in his astral form, and has complete control over his astral appearance as well.

When terror is useful, he will manifest a monstrous semi-humanoid shape similar to the appearance

BATRACHIAN HYBRIDS

— □ x

What follows are stats for the creatures that the Prime-Mortal can summon. These are also the same creatures that dwell in Alar, the Woeful City. They can also be found near the world's seacoasts where they worship their sleeping god Dagon and terrorize anyone unfortunate enough to stumble across their isolated communities.

Batrachian Hybrid (PL 5/ Minion Rank 6)

Str 16, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 8

Feats: All-Out Attack, Environmental Adaptation (aquatic), Rage, Trance

Skills: Notice 4 (+5), Sense Motive 4 (+5)

Powers: **Immunity 3** (cold, drowning, pressure; *Power Feats:* Innate), **Obscure 4** (visual; *Flaws:* Only Usable Underwater), **Protection 2**, **Super-Senses 1** (low-light vision; *Power Feats:* Innate), **Super-Strength 2**, **Strike 2** (*Power Feats:* Innate, Mighty), **Swimming 3** (*Power Feats:* Innate)

Combat: Attack +5, Grapple +10, Damage +3 (unarmed), +5 (strike), Defense +5, Knockback -2, Initiative +3

Savings Throws: Toughness +5, Fortitude +6, Reflex +6, Will +3

Totals: Abilities 16 + Skills 2 (8 ranks) + Feats 4 + Powers 24 + Combat 20 + Saves 8 = 74 PP

of his reshaped original body, which he keeps in a pocket dimension known as Alar, the Woeful City. Over the years, the Prime-Mortal has sculpted that body's flesh into a hulking mass of bat-like wings and squamous tentacles protruding unnaturally from a simian torso and a looming, cyclopean head. Even when the Prime-Mortal's soul is elsewhere, that body's nervous system will instinctively defend itself, trying to stuff intruders into the crooked mouth-like slit the stretches from its throat to its mid-section, and when alone it often consumes one or more of its own extremities as a precursor to growing new ones. The Prime-Mortal is always completely aware of all sensory input from this body, even when in full possession of another. The city surrounding the Prime-Mortal's body lives up to its name, a horrid sprawl of demented non-Euclidean architecture inhabited by both a stunted race of batrachian hybrids and a mysterious (perhaps soulless) tribe of human artists and sorcerers.

POWERS AND TACTICS

The Prime-Mortal is powerful on a scale that few mortal beings can even conceive—the Prime-Mortal

can twist space and time, manipulate matter and energy, and alter the very laws of nature. The Prime-Mortal is ageless and virtually invulnerable. The Nightmare Thing From Beyond rarely lowers himself to battling mere super-humans.

The Prime-Mortal is able to take physical possession of a willing human (or other intelligent living being). He can access all his powers when in the body of another, but it takes him time to make a new body invulnerable, and during this time a new body can be harmed by normal means. The Prime-Mortal's spirit, however, is unaffected by a body's death. Heroes that actually manage to defeat a newly-possessed body (no easy feat) may gain a false sense of confidence, one that will be quickly dispelled should they ever face the full might of the Prime-Mortal.

Those that bravely (or foolishly) attack the Prime-Mortal in any form will be casually swatted aside, or humbled in some manner, providing the monster with a moment of amusement. Those who persist in opposing the Prime-Mortal will find themselves facing any manner of monstrosities, grotesque horrors the Prime-Mortal can call forth at will. Such monsters will typically vanish a moment before they deliver the death-blow, dismissed with the slightest nod of their master's head. The Prime-Mortal savors humiliation, terror, and torment more than simple murder.

Killing the monstrous original body the Prime-Mortal keeps in the Woeful City will have little effect, as his spirit is likely to be elsewhere and he can simply return and reform a living version of the slain body at a later time. Even if the Prime-Mortal is in his original body, he can simply leave in his astral form before it is killed and return to our world to possess another, perhaps simply teleporting the remains of the original body remotely from the pocket dimension to another place where he can resuscitate it. The Magister has noted that the Prime-Mortal always keeps his original body somewhere safe when he is away, leading him to speculate that perhaps the Prime-Mortal needs the body for some reason. It is more likely, however, that this is an affectation, another leftover from the consciousness of the original shaman.

The creature does have a few limitations and weaknesses. The Prime-Mortal can read minds and communicate through thought alone, but cannot dominate the minds of others. He is repulsed by displays of genuine kindness and self-sacrifice. He will not directly attack holy places or destroy sanctified objects, as he hesitates to attract the attention of another god or demigod, but he freely commands or entices his human dupes into doing so.

IN GAME

The true Prime-Mortal is best treated as a plot device, an entity beyond the greatest efforts of the campaign's heroes to defeat, let alone permanently vanquish. While the power of the Prime-Mortal is not without restraint, it is for all practical purposes limitless within his sphere of influence (betrayal, deceit, and corruption). His proper function is as a source of adventures, and some possibilities are described below:

You Shouldn't Have Laughed at Me: An underpowered loser super-villain, Blue Ice, was determined to finally hit the Big Time. She wanted to make the headlines, get the fear and respect she deserved, make a name for herself. Seething over her many defeats, Blue Ice turned to the dark arts, ready to literally make a deal with the Devil to gain what she desired. She ended up contacting the Prime-Mortal instead. The Prime-Mortal told her she could have all the power she would ever need, so long as she was willing to let him possess her body for a little while. As she was ready to barter away her eternal soul, the deal sounded like a sweet one to the villain. Of course, she didn't know what she was agreeing to do.

The formerly rather hapless villain was indeed soon making headlines—as the worst spree killer in history. She murders randomly, tirelessly, and endlessly. Exhibiting powers far exceeding her old minor-league ice controlling abilities, she has plowed through squadrons of police to get to her intended victims. She is becoming ever more inventive in inflicting agony and humiliation before allowing her victims the mercy of death.

When the heroes confront her, the PCs discover that Blue Ice is neither a cold-blooded sadist nor a raving psychopath. Instead they find a wailing, worn figure, a shell of a woman who begs them to free her from the torment she is in, even if that means killing her. She appears to be exhausted from lack of sleep and food, and self-inflicted gashes cover her face and body. Despite her pleas however, she fights fiercely to avoid capture, striking with lethal force. Even while unleashing blasts of hellfire against the heroes, Blue Ice begs for their help. She was just a thief before, not a mass murderer or a depraved sadist, not until she allowed the Prime-Mortal to enter her body. She has been forced to murder and torture dozens, including all her own friends and even the grandparents who raised her.

No matter how the battle goes, the Prime-Mortal eventually decides that he has had enough fun at Blue Ice's expense and abandons her body, but not

before forcing her to inflict crippling injuries on her own body. She is dying, but before she expires she will describe her ordeal, and explain that she believes the entity that identified itself as the Prime-Mortal will commit this sort of horrible act again. If the heroes can act quickly enough they could probably save the young woman's life.

Corruption: A hero, perhaps even one of the PCs, is sent into forced retirement by a tragic event that leaves them disabled, powerless, or otherwise unable to continue on as a crime-fighter. Even after forced retirement, the character's fortunes continue to turn for the worse. The ex-hero's employment or business suffers, his or her personal relationships become strained, and other assorted setbacks happen on a regular basis. Despite the any and all efforts by the character's former allies to help, his or her life begins to fall apart.

The Prime-Mortal appears before the character as a majestic man in white robes, and explains that he is a spirit of justice given the responsibility of maintaining the balance between good and evil. He states that the character's downfall was no mere happenstance; it was orchestrated by an evil personage. This is true, of course, since the Prime-Mortal was responsible for the events that befell the retired hero.

The Prime-Mortal offers the character a chance to become a hero again. He supplies the hero with an arcane object, ritual, or magic potion that restores his or her powers (or grants entirely new ones, depending on the Game Master's wishes). The abilities granted are initially rather weak but grow stronger with use. However, they must be frequently recharged or renewed. But each time the hero does so, his or her personality

takes a turn for the worse. The individual becomes arrogant, hostile, and self-righteous, beginning to act as judge, jury, and eventually executioner when meting out justice.

Soon, the character's vigilante-style actions will be impossible for to ignore, but megalomania and paranoia make cause the hero to view any intervention by teammates as betrayal.

The Prime-Mortal has been grooming the character to join or even

lead a supervillain team composed of other corrupted heroes who have fallen under the Prime-Mortal's influence. The members of this "Damnation Council" include Armageddon Girl (see page 5), Radian (now fully corrupted by his cursed lantern, see page 59), and any other suitable candidates from the Game Master's own campaign. When the heroes respond to a group of supervillains attacking a children's hospital, they will be surprised to see the fallen hero among the opposition.

Once this threat is defeated, the key to saving the hero is persuading him or her to destroy the source of these new powers. Once this is done, the influence of the Prime-Mortal will wane and the character's own abilities will begin to resurface.

ENDGAME

Centuries before the ascendance of the current Archadept Arcane, there was a member of the ancient fraternity of sorcerers called the Order Without End who theorized that if, somehow, one could kill the Prime-Mortal's original body while his spirit was within it—and somehow prevent his spirit from escaping in the moments before death—the Prime-Mortal would be permanently destroyed. According to this theory, at the time of death the Prime-Mortal's spirit would either dissipate, returning its energies to the original extradimensional deity that spawned it, or move on to whatever final rest awaits the soul of any other mortal being. The Zimbabwean sorcerer was destroyed long before he could present this theory to his fellows, and even the Magister has not hit upon it. There is some means of destroying the Prime-Mortal—he is "mortal," after all—but it is

up to the GM to decide if this or another method is the one that will finally rid humanity of this omnipotent scourge.

RADIAN

Charlie Masters grew up in Philadelphia, raised by politically active parents whose status as an interracial couple had forced them to confront many of the prejudices and social problems of the 20th Century. They published a small leftist newspaper, *The Guardian*,

VITAL STATS: RADIAN

Quote: "THIS TIME IT WILL BE DIFFERENT."

Real Name: Charlie Masters

Aliases: Formerly known as Blaze

Occupation: Musician

Legal Status: Citizen of the United States

Identity: Secret

Marital Status: Single

Known Relatives: Ed and Pam Masters (parents)

Affiliation: None, briefly a member of a teenaged team of superhumans

Base of Operations: Mobile

Height: 6'

Weight: 190 lbs.

Hair: Black

Eyes: Brown

Distinguishing Marks: None

and were very involved in their community and in local activism.

It was in this climate that Charlie developed his strong sense of social justice. Charlie's natural aversion to authority was codified when the FBI conducted numerous investigations into his parent's activities. He vowed to protect the "little guy" whenever and wherever he could, but learned all too soon just how little the little guy really was in a world of super-heroes. When the time-devouring entity known as the Chronophage touched down in Philadelphia, it wrought widespread devastation that quickly escalated into full-scale carnage during its battle with a cadre of super-heroic champions.

Young Charlie was on the streets that day, trying to find shelter for his friends, when he was caught up in the pitched battle. The heroic female speedster, Atalanta, was forced to cut loose with her speed that day in a way she never had before, traveling so fast that numerous objects caught in her wake were pulled with her as she raced into the heart of the Chronophage. The existence of the universe was at stake, so Atalanta acted with uncharacteristic recklessness. She never noticed she had not only dragged numerous street signs and park benches with her in her desperate strike, but also a scared, skinny young black man who had been too busy helping his friends to seek shelter for himself.

The Magister (see page 33), leader of

the assembled heroes, had armed Atalanta with the Promethean Blade, a sword that burned with a mystic flame. When she plunged the flaming blade into the very center of the Chronophage's ectoplasmic anatomy, there was a blast of temporal energies followed by a coruscating wave of eldritch fire. Atalanta was seemingly disintegrated by the conflagration (see the entry on Nether, page 47, for her true fate) and Charlie's limp body flew several miles and crashed into the rubble of a ruined building.

Charlie awoke days later in a city hospital, his parents and friends at his bedside, and asked what had happened. No one seemed to know. In fact, they all gave conflicting accounts of the "super-villain" battle that had occurred days before. He

soon passed out again, and when he did, the Magister appeared to him in a dream. He told

Charlie that he was one of only two people on Earth who would ever accurately remember the details of that strange battle. After the explosion, the Magister and his allies had successfully banished the Chronophage from this reality and repaired the time-line, though they could not completely restore all that was lost. As a side effect, only a few would ever remember the battle had occurred had all, and no one would remember it perfectly—except the Magister and Charlie. Charlie's presence at the moment of the Chronophage's fall had left him unchanged by the alteration of the timeline.

Further, the Magister said, he sensed that Charlie, having been at ground zero of this unique release of space-time energies and elemental fire, had been affected in other ways. The Magister said little more, except



Jeff Parker

that he sensed the Charlie's body would fully recover, and that his strong, independent spirit would guide him along the strange and winding road of his destiny.

After Charlie's release from the hospital, it didn't take long for him to realize the Magister had spoken the truth. Something had changed within him. He seemed to be a living furnace. A roiling, all-consuming fire raged within him, a fire he could externalize—his fiery rebellion translated from metaphor to reality. Charlie could generate intense heat from his body, with no harm to himself. He could project that heat at range, and even fly on a column of superheated air.

He donned a makeshift costume and began looking after his neighborhood as the street hero "Blaze." He met many other super-heroic champions during this time, and briefly joined a group of other teen heroes, though he was not a member for long. His natural hatred of authority led to personality conflicts with the team's leader, who was really nothing more than a more established hero's sidekick, and Blaze quit the team in disgust. During this time he also indulged his second passion, music. He took advantage of his activist parents' travels to meet as many of the living jazz greats as he could, and became an accomplished saxophone player.

Between his travels and his super-heroics, Charlie found high school impossible, and he eventually dropped out to travel with a group of musicians. Despite never having graduated, he didn't worry about his future. Between Blaze's activities as a crime-fighter and his own career as musician, Charlie was living a life most people could only dream of.

But just as all memory of the Chronophage's rampage faded over time, so did some of its effects. In his early thirties, Charlie began to note a weakening in his powers. Slowly but surely, his abilities grew less and less potent, and despite consulting numerous scientists and mystics he had met in his travels, he was unable to counter the effect. One day, Charlie woke up and didn't have any super-powers at all.

He was devastated. He wandered the American Midwest for some time as a traveling street musician, trying to find his place in the world. Eventually he decided to pour himself into his music, but couldn't keep himself from attempts to lend support and leadership to various humanitarian causes. The urge to be a hero again never subsided.

Then, two years ago, a strange man approached Charlie, a mysterious figure known only as the Fixer. The Fixer was in possession of a mysterious artifact, a magical construct he called the Lantern. The Fixer understood the basics of its operation, its ability to shed a mystical light and use it for a variety of effects,

RADIAN

PL 11

STR

+2

14

DEX

+3

16

CON

+2

14

INT

+4

18

WIS

+3

16

CHA

+3

16

TOUGHNESS

+10

FORTITUDE

+6

REFLEX

+8

WILL

+10

SKILLS

Acrobatics 4 (+7), Bluff 4 (+7), Diplomacy 8 (+11), Drive 2 (+5), Gather Information 6 (+9), Intimidate 2 (+5), Investigate 6 (+10), Knowledge (art) 4 (+8), Knowledge (behavioral sciences) 4 (+8), Notice 6 (+9), Perform (wind instruments) 10 (+13), Search 4 (+8), Sense Motive 4 (+7), Stealth 4 (+7)

FEATS

Connected, Power Attack

POWERS

Device 11 ("The Lantern"; hard to lose)

DEVICES

The Lantern: **Enhanced Feats 2** (Assessment, Quick Change), **Mind Control 10** (Power Feats: Mental Link), **Protection 8**, **Main Lens** (array): **Blast 12** (Power Feats: Affects Insubstantial), **Blast 8** (Power Feats: Affects Insubstantial; Extras: Area – Cone), **Comprehend 2** (understand and read any language; Extras: Affects Others, Area – Cone), **Dazzle 8** (visual; Extras: Area – Cone), **Environmental Control 5** (light), **Flight 7** (Power Feats: Progression 3, Extras: Affects Others), **Force Field 7** (Extras: Affects Others, Area – Burst), **Obscure 12** (visual, blinding light), **Super-Senses 4** (Magical Awareness, Detect Lie, Tracking, X-Ray Vision [can't see through iron]; Extras: Affects Others, Area – Cone)

DRAWBACKS

Mania ("The Lantern", Uncommon, Minor)

COMBAT

Attack +10, Grapple +12, Damage +2 (unarmed), +12 (blast), +8 (cone blast), Defense +10, Knockback –5, Initiative +3

TOTALS

Abilities 34 + Skills 17 (68 ranks) + Feats 2 + Powers 75 + Combat 40 + Saves 16 – 1 Drawbacks 0 = 183 PP

and he wanted to investigate its potential. In order to examine it objectively, he needed someone else to use it, someone experienced in the unusual, but who had no powers of his own to conflict with the Lantern's own abilities. Through unknown sources, the Fixer had identified Charlie as a former hero, and he offered him the Lantern to use however he liked, as long as he liked. In exchange, Charlie would simply owe him "a favor."

The former hero jumped at the opportunity. Before the Fixer was even out the door, Charlie was searching for his old costume and thinking up new ways to reboot his super-heroic career. The name Blaze didn't seem to fit the Lantern's powers, so he soon came up with the name Radiant. But he soon decided Radiant didn't seem to roll off the tongue as well as Blaze had, so he shortened it to Radian. Once he had a name, a costume, and a basic understanding of the Lantern's powers, he leaped from his bedroom and once again took to the skies. Surely, he felt, this was what he was meant to do.

Since his re-emergence as Radian, Charlie has traveled extensively, fighting evil and injustice around the world. Police agencies in dozens of countries have found themselves allied with—or working against—the mysterious Radian. Always, he seeks to defend the common man, whether this means aiding local governments or working against them, or even attempting to overthrow unjust leaders and replace

them. This is Charlie's second chance, and the sky's the limit; he has bigger fish to fry than bank-robbers and mindless robots. Radian intends to change the world.

Over the past two years Charlie Masters has grown into his role as hero and aspires to become a leader. Remembering his youthful experiences, with some tool-of-the-Man sidekick trying to boss him around, he has avoided joining any pre-existing teams. Instead, he has fostered a number of younger heroes, including a powerful energy manipulator who's chosen the name Blaze as a tribute to his mentor's former identity. He believes himself well suited to lead teams and inspire individuals with his honor and courage.

However, those closest to Radian see a darkening in this would-be bearer of light. He has grown more possessive of his artifact, depending upon its powers instead of developing his own skills and abilities. Having lived without creature comforts in the past, Radian is no longer above using his powers in subtle ways to ensure his own wealth and prosperity. He doesn't get along the older generation of heroes, whose actions he often sees as fascist, and it doesn't take much to put him at odds with them, even to the point of defending certain criminals whom he feels are on the path to redemption. His distrust of police and government seems to have increased as well, and now borders on paranoia.

In the United States alone, Radian is wanted on several counts of aiding and abetting a fugitive, assault on a federal officer and even greater crimes, having broken into classified installations and released details of secret government weapons programs to the media. Recently he has discovered a new attribute of the Lantern, the ability to control people's minds. So far, he has only used its power to compel criminals to speak the truth, but he is considering using its power to modify their behavior in more permanent ways.

Watching all this from afar is the omnipotent Prime-Mortal (see page 52). It was he who instructed his agent, the Fixer, to give Radian the Lantern, knowing that the taint of an evil sorcerer curses the device, corrupting anyone who wields it for too long. He watches as this once incorruptible champion of justice becomes an agent of mere chaos, and laughs, waiting for the day that Radian will serve him willingly, a living weapon against the superheroic champions of the 21st Century.

STORY POINT



If you want to incorporate Radian into your campaign starting with his time as the street hero know as Blaze you may want to make use of the following adventure hook. This will establish Charlie Masters in the ongoing history of your campaign and make his eventual appearance as Radian all the more interesting.

The characters hear of a brash young street hero named Blaze performing violent vigilante work in a poor neighborhood. Police are concerned that his methods are too extreme and ask the heroes to investigate. Getting information out of the citizens is difficult because they all approve of what Blaze is doing.

When Blaze puts a gangbanger in a coma with third-degree burns, the police have had enough and issue a warrant. The citizens rally around the young vigilante and his violent methods and, aside from certain brave officers, the only people who will help the heroes are the other gang members. Will the heroes side with lawbreakers to enforce the law?

PERSONALITY

Having tasted the thrill of being a hero, Charlie never

In the eldritch ages before recorded time, the cruel sorcerer Amon Thok grew weary of binding the minions of darkness to his service and sought more challenging game—the scions of the light. Thok sought out the seraphim, mysterious and heavenly spirits of light which some occult scholars would later equate with the angels of the Old Testament. The powerful wizard bound his first seraph into a sword, another into a shield, and grew more and more defiant of the seraphim's power, even binding one into a bed-warmer.

Amon Thok's frequent challenges to the heavens themselves were finally answered when a powerful seraph appeared in the form of a bolt of blinding light. The battle laid waste to a continent before Amon Thok grasped the ephemeral vitae of the divine champion and bound the seraph into a fabulous lantern, intent on forging it into a terrible beacon whose searing light would burn the civilized nations from the face of the Earth. But the seraph was not beaten. Though bound for evil purposes, the source of the power was still bound to goodness and light, and could not be used for such evil. The Lantern manifested attributes befitting a spirit of light—the ability to tell falsehood from truth, to compel honesty, and to drive the shadow of evil from the kingdoms of men. Amon Thok was not pleased.

The Lantern languished in the sorcerer's trophy room for decades as yet another symbol of his power. But within the Lantern, the seraph was marshaling the last of its strength, calling to a hero whose people had long suffered under Amon Thok. While the sorcerer was away in the far dimension of Koth, the hero climbed the walls of his dark tower and claimed the Lantern for his own. The young man became the first wielder of the Lantern, destroying Amon Thok's tower and smiting his proud army.

By the time the sorcerer returned, the Lantern-bearing hero had reduced his kingdom to rubble. Amidst the rubble they fought a terrible battle. But in the end, the seraph's power and the will of man, working in concert, were too much for the vile sorcerer. With Amon Thok's death, the seraph was finally freed. But as Amon Thok's soul plunged into hell, the black-hearted mage spat a final curse, not on the hero, but on the Lantern itself.

Though the seraph was free, great power remained in the Lantern—power now tainted by the will of Amon Thok. The young hero died of his wounds, and the Lantern was lost for a time. Over the ages, heroes and villains alike have bent the Lantern to their wills, or have been bent to the Lantern's will. The last person to wield the Lantern was the WWII hero called the "Lighthouse Keeper." After the war, the Lantern's curse corrupted the fallen hero's mind, driving him to greater and greater acts of evil, until the Astounding Trio (see page 5) confronted him in his lighthouse headquarters. In the course of that superhuman melee, the Lighthouse Keeper met an accidental death, his lighthouse was toppled, and the Lantern was lost once again.

Eventually, the Lantern came into the hands of the mysterious meta-human investigator called the Fixer, who sought insight into the enigmatic relic. He recruited former hero Charlie Masters as the newest bearer of the Lantern, and has been observing both hero and artifact ever since. Already the idealistic Masters—now calling himself Radian—has fallen victim to the Lantern's effects. Whether he has the will to resist falling into true evil, as the Lighthouse Keeper did, remains to be seen.

gave up hope that his day would come again. In or out of costume, he is still addicted to the rush of being just at the edge of disaster. Now he is also addicted to the rush of the Lantern itself, and would sooner kill than part with it.

APPEARANCE

Charlie Masters is an African-American male in his late thirties who keeps himself in excellent physical condition. When out of costume, he dresses simply, but prefers suits when performing. He has a winsome and easy smile, but since he received the Lantern the intensity of his gaze makes people uncomfortable. Whether in street clothes or formal attire, he is always

adorned with a small cluster of buttons declaring his support of various social causes, grass-roots organizations, and controversial leaders.

POWERS AND TACTICS

Most of the Lantern's powers emanate from its main lens, the source of a strange mystical light. It can control light and project it as hard light, which can bear the wielder aloft or protect him with a force field. The light also pierces all falsehoods and can even shine through any material, except iron. It can be shone on text in a foreign language, or even on someone speaking such a tongue, and that language will be understood by anyone within range so long as

CORRUPTION OF THE LANTERN



The Lantern is a powerful artifact of light, yet it has a dark influence on those who wield it over extended periods of time. As shown by the Lighthouse Keeper in the mid-20th Century, even the noblest heart can be turned to evil.

The corrupting influence of the Lantern is not involuntary, like a virus. At some point after the hero becomes comfortable with the Lantern's power, he will be tempted. It almost always occurs at a moment of dire need, when a sudden infusion of power is needed. At that moment the Lantern offers a bargain. Power for a price is offered. The hero may take a weakness starting at the lowest intensity on the "Mania" list (see the Sidebar, Drawback: Mania) and put the resulting PP into *immediate* use like any other PP. The points can be used to increase abilities, purchase feats, skills and powers, or unlock more powers of the Lantern itself (this is best achieved by adding to the "Main Lens" array). The Lantern will then wait a time before making another such offer.

it is under the Lantern's light. The Lantern's powers do not stop there. It is also covered in numerous switches and movable lenses that allow the wielder to create various other mystical effects. Radian has discovered that its light can even overpower the minds of others, allowing him to temporarily control anyone who may fall under the Lantern's light. However, these powers come at a terrible price (see the sidebar: Corruption of the Lantern for details).

IN GAME

Radian can serve in his capacity as hero or villain in your campaign. As a hero, Radian is a man with a complicated and idealistic agenda who is slowly being corrupted by the device that allowed him to resume his superheroic career. In his role as hero, Radian's methods and approaches can easily complicate the PCs' crime-fighting efforts. He has little faith in the justice system and will utilize means of apprehending criminals and even make attempts at rehabilitation that will cross the line. As a former hero whose crossing the line of madness into villainy, Radian would make for an unpredictable and possibly even sympathetic foe. More specific ideas for incorporating Radian into your campaign follow:

New Hero in Town: A newly arrived Radian seeks to bring his own brand of justice to the heroes' city. Radian may accept the heroes' assistance on a few

DRAWBACK: MANIA



You have a powerful attraction to a person, place or object that you find difficult to resist. The attraction must be clearly defined when the weakness is taken. Frequency is based on how often you are become concerned with the object of your mania. Intensity is based on the severity of your mania as outlined below.

- **Minor:** You are preoccupied thinking about or worrying about the subject of your mania. If the subject of your mania is not present, you suffer a cumulative -2 penalty on all checks for mental actions or powers.
- **Moderate:** You cannot stand to be parted with object of your mania. You suffer a cumulative -1 penalty on all checks for mental actions or powers. Every day you spend away from the subject of your mania, you must make a Will save (DC 20) with failure indicating that you must make every reasonable effort to be reunited with the source of your mania.
- **Major:** You feel you must have the object of your mania in close proximity to you at all times. If the object of your mania is not in close proximity, you must make a Will save (DC 25) or suffer a cumulative -1 penalty to all checks, attack rolls, and Defense until you are reunited with the object of your mania. If the Will save is failed you must make every effort to be reunited with the source of your mania, except for any action that might result in great harm or death.

missions, but they will soon find that he is a bad team player when not in charge, and his approach to crime fighting differs from their own. His approach is holistic: after apprehending a criminal, he will seek to determine what in his background led to his antisocial behavior. He will visit the criminal's neighborhood, parents, and so on, all in an effort to diagnose the social problems that led this person to a life of crime. If the heroes see their fight against crime in very black and white terms, they may find Radian's philosophies and willingness to get involved in the community a little discomfiting. Radian will not hesitate to chastise the heroes for doing too little, and will likely try to place himself in a position of leadership within the team.

Dirty Laundry Day: Videotapes made by local politicians begin arriving at news stations around

the city. On each tape, the politician claims he can no longer live with his guilt and comes clean about every shady backroom deal, campaign fund misuse and extramarital affair he's been involved in. If the heroes investigate, the only common thread they will find is that each politician is not only seeing a therapist, they're all seeing the same therapist. The therapist's background and credentials won't hold up to scrutiny. The therapist is Radian (who not only is not a licensed therapist, but never even finished high school) operating under an assumed name. He's using the Lantern to mind control the politicians and force them into exposing the corruption in the city's government... and if the heroes interfere, they're next.

The Lighthouse Keeper's Legacy: The WWII bearer of the Lantern carried the artifact longer than any other wielder. His exposure to it caused physical as well as psychological changes. Because of these changes, the curse of the Lantern carried on to the next generation. His son developed mutant powers and inherited his father's obsession with the Lantern. Calling himself the Darklighter, he has been tracking Radian for years. When he finally catches up to his quarry, his legacy allows him to wrest control of the Lantern from Radian. With the Lantern's grip on him complete, the Darklighter embarks on a destructive rampage as his madness reaches full bloom. Radian's own obsession with the Lantern may be brought to light, as it becomes apparent he is more concerned with reclaiming the Lantern itself than helping any victims of the ensuing destruction.

Back in Black: Amon Thok has searched for a means of escape ever since falling into the Underworld. As the Lantern still holds some lingering trace of Amon Thok, only it can serve as a vehicle for his return to the world. Now that the Lantern is in use again, Thok has been able to reach through it and take control of some impressionable minds in the Lantern's vicinity. A small cult has formed as the result of this influence. This cult has been living in Charlie Masters's

apartment building, posing as friendly neighbors. They have performed ritual after ritual, as instructed by their evil master, in an effort to open the conduit that connects Thok and the Lantern. One day, they finally succeed.

A crack in the Lantern's surface unexpectedly forms. Unexplained crimes begin occurring all over the city as otherwise good people succumb to the dark powers seeping from the Lantern. Radian seeks out the heroes' assistance in containing the escaping energies. Not long after that, the Lantern will split open as a rift in reality forms. Amon Thok will make his return to the world and the city will truly be in the grip of evil. The rift will remain and the heroes will need to find a way to send the powerful sorcerer back through. But the rift cannot be closed without repairing the Lantern. If the heroes lack the ability to do this, they will have to seek out another powerful sorcerer, such as the Magister, while the city is altered by Amon Thok's reality-warping influence.

ENDGAME

As long as Radian is in possession of The Lantern (and under its influence), he will continue to become more and more manic, and his obsession with The Lantern will deepen. If allowed to continue on this course, Radian will eventually play into the Prime-Mortal's hands. He will unlock enough of the Lantern's powers to attempt to take "control" of what he sees as an irredeemably corrupt and flawed society and light the way into a gentler, peaceful new age. Of course this will never work, as human nature cannot be changed overnight, and Radian's ultimate attempt to correct society's ills will only breed the sort of mayhem and tragedy that the Prime-Mortal craves.

SWEET SYN

In the lower dimensional depths there lay an infernal dimension known as Vhaal, a backwater hell that was even beneath the notice of the entities that ruled that corner of the Underworld. As far as hells go, Vhaal was of little consequence. Its

VITAL STATS: SWEET SYN

Quote: "ALLOW ME TO SHOW YOU HOW MUCH PLEASURE ONE CAN HAVE BY SIMPLY PUTTING ASIDE ALL YOUR FOOLISH INHIBITIONS."

Real Name: Synn'agrasta

Aliases: Cynthia Smith, Synndi Shannon

Occupation: Model, actress, formerly a slave

Legal Status: American Citizen with no criminal record, fugitive of Vhaal

Identity: Public

Marital Status: Single

Known Relatives: Grue-G'rog (father)

Affiliation: None

Base of Operations: Mobile

Height: 5'10

Weight: 130

Hair: Brown

Eyes: Varies

Distinguishing Marks: Strikingly beautiful

demonic denizens skirmished over petty insults, and the lost souls that were deposited there were of too little consequence to warrant true damnation. The stinking air was not filled with the tortured screams of the damned, but with the endless, incoherent murmuring of wayward spirits. The brutish, demonic natives of Vhaal labored endlessly to provide tribute to the more powerful entities in the higher realms of the Underworld. They mined what little diabolic ore that could be found in the barren landscape and used that ore to manufacture arms for the fiendish armies that waged constant war across the myriad Underworld dimensions.

For the Vhaalian known as Synn'agrasta, a lowly demon-slave, the torment of this place was made all the worse, because she was saddled with the curse of imagination. Each night she suffered through dreams of a better life. She dreamed of the Machiavellian intrigues of a royal court, or the wicked debaucheries of a torrid romance. Her dreams and her daydreams made her crushing day-to-day existence all the more unbearable. Sadly, Synn'agrasta knew that such hopes only made her own world all the more unbearable.

But when Synn'agrasta saw a portal open and three strange beings step into Vhaal from the world's beyond, she discovered her dreams were real. She caught a glimpse of the wonderful world on the other side of the portal. A world filled with towering edifices of gleaming glass and smooth stone. She saw throngs of people walking across stone-ribbed streets as smoke-belching

conveyances carried even more people at fantastic speeds.

The three beings were heroes from the Earth realm, the Astounding Trio, and they were on a mission to obtain a strange potion from Synn's father, a cruel and powerful warlock. When they obtained what they had come for, the three heroes clasped hands and uttered the mystic phrase that gave them their magnificent powers. A torrent of mystic flame



burned a hole between dimensions and the group stepped through to their home dimension. Synn'agrasta again saw her dreams made real, and decided to follow them. The Astounding Trio arrived in their native realm, unaware that the bedraggled semi-demon was only a split second behind them.

That split second proved to be a crucial one. Due to the vagaries of dimensional travel, Synn'agrasta arrived on Earth nearly fifty years after the Astounding Trio, and she found herself not in the gleaming city of the 1940s but in a filthy back alley of Santa Obscura. Despite being deposited in one of the most squalid sections of the city, Synn'agrasta saw her new surrounding as breathtakingly beautiful. The smoggy air tasted like the sweetest nectar compared to the choking stench of Vhaal, and the cracked asphalt beneath her feet was opulent compared to the muck and offal she was accustomed to trudging through.

Using the limited shape-shifting abilities common to all the natives of Vhaal, Synn'agrasta assumed a human appearance and concealed her demonic aspects. She ventured into this strange new world and her first encounter with the natives was not friendly one; two drunken thugs assaulted her. She tore into them like a wild animal and left the two battered and unconscious. Synn'agrasta emerged from the encounter with serviceable, albeit ill-fitting, clothing and the two men's valuables. Feeling powerful for the first time in her life, she left the dingy alleyway and entered the wider world.

Over time, Synn'agrasta learned the language and customs of her new home. During this time she came to the startling realization that while her demonic form may have been small and homely by infernal standards, her new found human guise qualified her as one of the most beautiful women on Earth. The people around her could barely conceal their lust for her. Furthermore, there was some factor in the Earth's environment that magnified her charm and sex appeal. She found that even complete strangers would accede to any request she made.

Synn'agrasta adopted the name Cynthia Smith and secured employment as the hostess of a trendy L.A. eatery. Before long she was "discovered" by a prestigious modeling agency that gave her a generous contract and the stage name of Synndi Shannon. Before long she was one of the most sought after models in the world, and she was strutting the runways of London, New York, Paris and Milan. Mainstream fame followed as she appeared on magazine covers, in television commercials, and on billboards. Two year later she made her first appearance on the silver screen. Despite her limited acting ability, her beauty and raw sex appeal was

SWEET SYNNDI						PL 8	
STR	+5	20	INT	+2	14		
DEX	+5	20	WIS	+4	12		
CON	+6	22	CHA	+10	30		
TOUGHNESS			FORTITUDE			REFLEX	
+9			+9			+8	
						WILL	
						+1	
SKILLS							
Bluff 12 (+22), Diplomacy 12 (+22), Disguise 3 (+13/+33), Drive 1 (+6), Gather Information 4 (+14), Language 3 (Native - Demonic, English, French Spanish), Notice 5 (+6), Sense Motive 8 (+9), Stealth 8 (+13)							
FEATS							
Attractive 2, Benefit (status), Connected, Distract, Fascinate (Diplomacy), Inspire, Minions 6 (ten 45 PP minions)							
POWERS							
Immunity 6 (aging, disease, poison, need for sleep, environmental cold and heat, <i>Power Feats</i> : Innate), Mental Transform 5 ("demonic pheromones ", <i>Power Feats</i> : Innate, <i>Extras</i> : Alternate Save – Fortitude, Area – Explosion, Duration – Continuous; <i>Flaws</i> : Sense-Dependent – Smell), Morph 4 (humanoid, +20 to Disguise, <i>Power Feats</i> : Innate), Regeneration 5 (Bruised 1, Unconscious 1, Injured 1, Staggered 1, Disabled 1, <i>Power Feats</i> : Innate, Regrowth)							
COMBAT							
Attack +4, Grapple +9, Damage +5 (unarmed), Defense +10, Knockback –4, Initiative +6							
TOTALS							
Abilities 58 + Skills 14 (56 ranks) + Feats 13 + Powers 33 + Combat 28 + Saves 9 = 155 PP							

enough to fuel ticket sales.

These days Synndi Shannon has become a media personality whose noted more for her hard-partying ways, string of famous boyfriends, and globe-trotting antics than she is for her modeling work or film roles. After British tabloids coined the shortened moniker "Synn" in their headlines, Synndi has taken

ORIGIN-IN-A-BOX



You were born a miserable hatchling in the muck and mire of the Underworld dimension known as Vhaal. You were exposed to the riotous mystical forces that presaged the Astounding Trio's arrival on Vhaal. Being a magical creature, this violent infusion of positive energies at such a formative stage set into motion changes that would forever alter your destiny. Attracted to this new source of "nourishment", you managed to scuttle through the muck and leap through the Trio's portal just as it closed. You were trapped in Infraspaces, the void between dimensions, for what seemed both like an eternity and a mere moment. Eventually, you appeared on Earth, fully grown, in the same dirty alleyway where your brood-sister, Synn'agasta, had arrived in several years earlier. You have little memory of Vhaal and only a vague memory of your "sister".

This origin is useful for creating a character with a demonic nature, who still has great potential for heroism. This origin will give a character the shape-shifting powers inherent to his kind and also extra abilities that can be attributed to his exposure to the energies conjured by the Astounding Trio. This exposure to "good magic" gives the character an intrinsic sense of good and evil that he or she might not otherwise possess.

Vhaalian Mutant, Template

Feats: Improved Initiative

Powers: **Adaptation 5** (Extras: Reaction), **Comprehend 1** (languages), **Immunity 1** (vhaalian pheromones), **Enhanced Strength 7**, **Enhanced Dexterity 7**, **Enhanced Constitution 7**, **Morph 4** (humanoid, +20 to Disguise)

Cost: 83 PP

to referring to herself by this shortened version of her name. She is also set to release a new fragrance called "Sweet Synn" that plays on her new nickname.

PERSONALITY

Despite her fiendish nature, Sweet Synn is almost naïve; she holds no malice whatsoever towards any other living thing. She far prefers the world of man to the hellish realm where she was whelped and raised. She simply wishes to exult in her newfound freedom, revel in the chaos of the earthly plane, and enjoy the best this world has to offer. While she can be quite generous, donating freely to charities and causes that strike her fancy, and lavishly rewarding

those who work for her, she is ruthless to those who oppose her.

Another element of Synn's personality is her deep-seated vanity and pride. This is due in part to her demonic nature and also in part to her long history of humiliation on Vhaal. She is a case study in cognitive dissonance. Not only can she not accept rejection, she *will not*. If she has an interest in a particular individual she will presume that that person is completely smitten with her. If that person resists her charms, she will resort to slander, dirty tricks, blackmail and outright violence to get her revenge. Revenge for an affront that she will not fully admit even occurred, not even to herself.

APPEARANCE

Synn is an extraordinarily beautiful woman. She is tall and lithe, with waist-length auburn hair and flawless copper-colored skin. She has utterly exquisite bone structure, almost-golden eyes, and full, scarlet-red lips. She is the personification of the term exotic beauty. In her natural state, Sweet Synn has short, stunted horns, a scaly tinge to her skin, a curly, pig-like tail, and hairy, cloven hooves. Though she was considered ugly and misshapen in her native dimension, aside from her demonic characteristics her face and form would be considered nearly perfect by human standards.

POWERS AND TACTICS

As stated, Sweet Synn is inhumanly attractive and charismatic. Even those few that might not be swayed by her beauty alone usually find themselves drawn by her voice, her scent, and her aura. Her demonic pheromones allow her to exert an unearthly influence over ordinary people, making them susceptible to her commands. Unfortunately the effects of her demonic pheromones linger even after she has moved on, causing her former friends and lovers, those with whom she had grown bored with and broken off contact, to suffer bouts of wild mood swings, depression, manic behavior and even violence. These unfortunate individuals may spend weeks, months, or even years trying to recapture the sensation of pure pleasure they felt when they were with her. This may lead them to all manner of dangerous, self-destructive actions, including various forms of drug addiction, thrill seeking and pathological jealousy.

Due to her demonic heritage, Synn possesses slightly superhuman strength, speed, and vitality. She can rapidly heal from nearly any injury and suffers no long-lasting harm from her substance abuse and

hard-partying lifestyle. Barring a violent death, Synn can expect to live for centuries. Despite her abilities, Synn would be hard-pressed in a fight with a superhuman. As a rule she tends to avoid physical confrontations, and depends on her contingent of bodyguards and over-protective lovers to protect her from overzealous paparazzi and stalkers. Besides, Synn's ability to seduce almost anyone usually precludes the necessity for violence.

IN GAME

Sweet Synn can occupy the rather unique role in your campaign of nonstop party girl. She can be found almost anywhere in the world. Her desires to keep the media at arm's length (mainly to protect her secrets) and her career both keep her moving from city to city. Synn surrounds herself with fellow hedonists and leaves chaos in her wake. Her demonic nature makes her a danger to those around her. Not only does she wreak emotional havoc by disrupting friendships, marriages and the like but her demonic essence awakens destructive passions in the men and women she takes on as intimates. These unfortunates come to share her unbridled lust for pleasure, but they lack her inhuman endurance, and their fragile human bodies often end up paying a terrible price.

If the heroes do anything to disrupt her lifestyle she will use her charms and her influence over the people around her to make sure the heroes pay for their affront. If she believes someone has discovered that she is more than she seems, she will first attempt to seduce her way out of the situation, but if this fails, she will use bribery, intimidation, threats, and finally outright violence, resorting to torture or murder to keep her secret. A few ways to incorporate Synn into your campaign follow:

Girls Night Out: Synn is staging a gala fundraiser, a celebration of the "diversity of women". The event will raise money for charities that aid abused and underprivileged women, however, Synn is only holding the fundraiser on the advice of her manager. He believes it will help Synn's image by showing she cares about social causes and might not be as shallow as she appears. To reinforce this, Synn's manager has invited notable female entertainers, athletes, and superheroes, including a few who do not fit the traditional supermodel mold. The event consists of a fashion show followed by a lavish party. Synn will host the event and at one point she will actually appear in her true semi-demonic form onstage, passing it off as part of "a sexy little devil" costume she is wearing. She is delighted to have the chance to strut around

undisguised in front of hundreds of people without arousing suspicion. She doesn't really care about any of the social issues involved; to Synn the event is just another excuse to party, get her picture taken, and bask in the attention of other rich, important, and beautiful people. Unfortunately, several supervillains are at the bash as well. Some were invited by Synn ("just to stir things up a bit") and are just there for a good time, while a few others are crashing the party for their own reasons. For example, Nether (see page 47) is there to scout out one of her future targets, and maybe make some connections in the process and Troll (see page 70) showed up simply to ogle all the gorgeous supermodels, especially Synn. Given the explosive mix of alcohol, personalities, and superpowers, the party could erupt into mayhem at any time. The heroes may be present because they were invited, or were brought in as additional security by concerned local officials or maybe they are there because they believe in the charity. Synn's pheromones could even lead to villains fighting villains and heroes fighting heroes. Whatever the case, it's sure to be a hell of a party.

Seduction of a Hero: Synn is shooting her latest big-budget movie on location in the heroes' hometown. When the police receive what they believe to be a credible tip that Synn has been targeted for kidnapping by a notorious supervillain, the heroes are asked to help guard the film set. The kidnapping threat either proves to be unfounded or the supervillain is defeated. In either case, Sweet Synn becomes romantically interested in one of the heroes. The character can be male or female, human, mutant, or alien. Synn may even choose to lavish her affections on a hero normally not considered particularly comely or attractive, as she is more interested in having new experiences than in conventional notions of beauty. Synn's supernatural charms are hard to resist, and any character that succumbs will eventually begin displaying the negative effects. When she inevitably abandons the hero and returns to Hollywood, the PC's behavior will grow worse as the character desperately attempts to regain the feelings of euphoria Synn's pheromones provided by engaging in erratic and unstable behavior. The character may also go a step further by stalking the elusive Synn. Eventually the hero's friends and allies will be forced to intervene in the situation. This may prompt them to begin investigating the capricious starlet. What is it about her that nearly drove a responsible, upstanding hero crazy with lust and what can they do to cure their friend of the obsession? If the hero does not fall for Synn's enticements, she will be furious. She'll make

all sorts of nasty comments to the media, circulate unflattering stories about the hero, and basically do her worst to ruin any the character's career and reputation. After a few weeks or months of this, she will forget her malicious fixation and move on. She may even send a note of apology and an expensive gift to make up for her spiteful misdeeds.

Sinful Scents: A wildly successful new perfume line hits the market, "Sweet Synn by Synndi Shannon". The ad campaign claims that the products were formulated to mimic the scent of Synn, the "most desired woman in the world", and is guaranteed to heighten any woman's sex appeal. The products are being test released in the heroes' city before an anticipated national release. Unfortunately, the claims made in the ads are not mere hype. The perfume was designed by a brilliant biochemist, Professor Deanna Stout, who partially duplicated the alluring, infernal essence of Sweet Synn's pheromones. The scents are intoxicating as well as enticing. Women who regularly use the products become increasingly bold and sexually aggressive, to the point of danger. Soon the city is flooded with reports of previously normal college students, businesswomen, housewives, and grandmothers seemingly overtaken by an outbreak of unbridled (and unhinged) passion. Sweet Synn will attempt to lay the entire blame for the fiasco on the biochemist, denying any knowledge of the researcher's methods and even fabricating evidence against Professor Stout. The professor herself does not suspect Synn is a demon, though she believes the woman may be a low-level mutant.

ENDGAME

Synn has no reason to put a stop to her hedonistic ways. She will continue to party and will continue to leave jilted and obsessed lovers in her wake. Young heiresses, stars and pop idols who come into contact with her will embark on destructive binges that will end with a much-publicized trip to rehab or perhaps even a lethal overdose. Synn's

time in the limelight may eventually draw unwanted attention. Powerful people in mystical circles may become aware of Synn's true nature and desire her as a concubine or as the needed component in some arcane ritual. Whatever the case, even though Synn could endure her volatile lifestyle for centuries, she is simply riding too high for it to be sustainable.

Should she fall out of favor or otherwise be forced to keep a low profile, Synn will discover another facet of her demonic nature—a desire to be worshiped and a propensity for making infernal pacts. She will cultivate and acquire a large following of worshipers. A very literal cult will spring up around her, composed of people who live and die by her word. This will be a completely new experience for her and she will discover one of life's sweetest nectars—power. This could lead her to establish an infernal religion on Earth or could instill in her the desire to return to her native dimension of Vhaal as its queen.

TROLL

Short version—Troll is a large, ugly, nearly invulnerable, and functionally amoral individual who works as muscle in the criminal underworld of cities around the world.

Long version—Troll is a unique specimen, a being who possesses resistance to harm on par with that of some of the world's most powerful superhumans,

yet evidences no interests or ambitions beyond eating, drinking, gambling, partaking of drugs, having sex and committing violence.

The creature called Troll is widely believed to be a mutant, no different from the scores of other unexplained superhumans that have emerged with the advent of the atomic age, and Troll himself, never having known his parents, accepts this as the truth. In reality, Troll lives up to his name: he is, quite simply, a troll, a not-quite-mythical horror from the depths of Scandinavian folklore brought to 21st century life as an immortal

VITAL STATS: TROLL



Quote: "SO LEMME GIT THIS STRAIGHT; YOU BEEN WAITIN' A THOUSAND LIFE TIMES TA GIT THIS THING BACK, AND IF I RIPS IT OFF FOR YA, YER POWERS WILL BE UNMATCHED AND YOU'LL FINALLY TAKE OVER THE WORLD? OK. WHATEVER FLOATS YER BOAT HOT-SHOT. YA GOT MY MONEY?"

Real Name: Francisco "Frank" Birch

Aliases: None

Occupation: Thug

Legal Status: U.S. Citizen with a long criminal record

Identity: Public

Marital Status: Single

Known Relatives: None

Affiliation: None

Base of Operations: Santa Obscura

Height: 7'

Weight: 450 lbs.

Hair: None

Eyes: Black

Distinguishing Marks: Gray skin, tusk-like fangs, no body hair

underworld thug.

Troll's story begins in Los Franciscos, California, in the winter of 1962. A group of truant children found a gray-skinned infant abandoned underneath the Los Franciscos-side of Birchville Bridge. The children's parents summoned local police, who conducted the infant Troll to a hospital for treatment. There, doctors examined the child – left exposed to the elements for days without food or parental care during a harsh winter – and pronounced him, amazingly, to be a perfectly healthy (but not exactly human) child. It was surmised that the child's apparent deformity was the reason for his abandonment. After weeks of searching determined that his parents could not be located, Troll was placed in an orphanage and given the name Francisco "Frank" Birch, after the bridge under which he was found.

As the boy grew, his natural traits became more apparent. He was rather large for his age, not to mention having gray rocklike skin and the ability to lift small cars. The natural temper he (unknowingly) inherited from his troll lineage at first simply got him into trouble, but soon led to a life of fighting, stealing, vandalism, turmoil and delinquency. He was in and out of group-homes, foster-care and orphanages until the age of nine, when he badly mauled a priest at a Catholic boys' home (though it was never fully explained why the priest was in the Boys Dormitory at 3am). Young Frank was quickly remanded to Los Franciscos County Juvenile

Hall.

With his natural size and strength, Frank soon *ran* Los Franciscos County Juvenile Hall. By age fifteen, his powers were increasing at such a frightening rate that the inmates and guards were all afraid of Frank, as neither batons nor guns could harm him. They were relieved when Frank also realized that the bars, gates and walls could no longer hold him, and therefore concluded that he didn't need to be there anymore. Frank broke out and escaped north to the crime-ridden metropolis of Santa Obscura, where he quickly found a place in the criminal underground.

Troll quickly made a name for himself as thug, enforcer and muscle for hire. He has aged very slowly, if at all, since adolescence, living the life of a mob lieutenant and mercenary in Santa Obscura ever since his arrival thirty years ago, and still shows no signs of slowing down.

Over the years, he's worked all over the world, taking jobs from petty crime bosses and world-class diabolical masterminds alike. Now he's an urban legend on both sides of the law, respected among the criminal element and feared by police everywhere.

The U.S. Government holds Troll responsible for billions of dollars in disaster relief. Recently, he destroyed twenty-nine police vehicles while leading the FBI on a seven-state car chase, during which he stole no less than ten vehicles in every state.

In jewelry alone he's stolen enough over the years to be a multi-billionaire, if he hadn't blown every cent of it on women, controlled substances,



TROLL

PL 15

STR	+8	26	INT	+1	12
DEX	+2	14	WIS	+1	13
CON	+6	23	CHA	+1	13
TOUGHNESS			FORTITUDE		
+15			+6		
			REFLEX		
			+5		
			WILL		
			+3		

SKILLS

Bluff 3 (+4), Climb (+8), Computers 2 (+3), Craft (mechanical) 5 (+6), Craft (electronic) 5 (+6), Disable Device 4 (+5), Drive 8 (+10), Gather Information 4 (+5), Intimidate 6 (+7), Streetwise 7 (+8), Notice 6 (+7), Search 3 (+4), Sense Motive 4 (+5), Stealth 3 (+5)

FEATS

Assessment, Attack Focus (melee) 4, Chokehold, Diehard, Fearless, Fearsome Presence, Improved Grab, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative, Improved Pin, Improved Sunder, Improved Throw, Inventor, Takedown Attack 2, Weapon Break

POWERS

Immunity 30 (Fortitude Saves; *Power Feats*: Innate), **Protection 9** (*Power Feats*: Innate; *Extras*: Impervious), **Regeneration 31** (Recovery Bonus 3, Bruised 3, Unconscious 3, Injured 6, Staggered 6, Disabled 4, Ability Damage 6; *Power Feats*: Innate, Persistent, Regrowth), **Strike 10** (*Power Feats*: Innate, Mighty), **Super-Senses 2** (Low-Light Vision, Scent; *Power Feats*: Innate), **Super-Strength 6** (*Power Feats*: Innate)

COMBAT

Attack +8, +12 (melee), Grapple +28, Damage +8 (unarmed), +18 (strike), Defense +8, Knockback -12, Initiative +6

TOTALS

Abilities 41 + Skills 15 (60 ranks) + Feats 19 + Powers 112 + Combat 32 + Saves 5 = 224 PP

temporary housing, and hastily destroyed cars. The only wealth he maintains is a fortune in gold he keeps hidden, for reasons even Troll himself does not understand, in an underwater grotto beneath the

Santa Obscura Bridge.

In a dank cavern, somewhere in Scandinavia, two trolls are very, very proud.

PERSONALITY

Despite the cunning he displays while planning or performing a job, in Troll's everyday life he is incurious and illiterate, interested in little more than personal gratification. He enjoys eating, drinking, gambling, drugs, sex and violence. He also enjoys gangster movies and loud, angry music of all kinds. Troll regularly takes as much time choosing the music he will listen to in the car during a job as he does picking weapons and crew.

Even with his poor education, Troll is a sly and clever adversary. Although easily enraged when things don't go his way (due to his inhuman heritage), Troll keeps his cool during most of his violent escapades, for the simple reason that there are very few things in existence that can keep him from getting his way. He obviously has no qualms about stealing, killing, blowing things up and otherwise causing general mayhem; in fact he enjoys those things. When he's "working," Troll prefers the direct approach (i.e. busting in, crushing all those who oppose him, taking what he wants and leaving). Thus, few suspect Troll's penchant for acting subtly when the situation requires it. Whatever his tactics, Troll will clearly do anything to achieve his self-centered goals, and is known for stealing police cars, shooting any living thing in his path, "shopping" for vehicles at crowded intersections, and taking hostages.

Whenever Troll does too many "easy" jobs in a row, he finds himself spoiling for a fight, and begins committing even more unnecessarily egregious acts of destruction solely to attract SWAT teams and the like. He genuinely takes pleasure in violence and property destruction, and often triumphs solely because of his sheer determination to wreak more bloody havoc than his opponents. Troll will use anything and everything as a weapon, from sub-machine guns to hurled cars. On some of his more daring missions he has escaped by *seeking* danger: escaping into burning buildings, jumping motorcycles off of rooftops, diving out of moving helicopters, attacking police and military just for their weapons (or vehicles, or both), or any number of things that could be viewed as insane— if it weren't for the fact that such acts don't really endanger him at all.

APPEARANCE

Troll is 7 ft. tall, weighs 450 pounds and has gray, lumpy skin that resembles a cross between a

rhinoceros' hide and granite. He has inhumanly large teeth, jutting tusk-like fangs, thick black nails and no body hair. Other magical creatures or scholars of the arcane would undoubtedly recognize him as a troll.

POWERS AND TACTICS

Trolls are real and *the Troll* is one of them. Like other trolls he possesses immense strength, durability and endurance. In combat he is generally straight-forward but if he feels that a direct approach would be unwise he will display ruthless cunning (i.e. employing ambush tactics, playing possum, retreating long enough for his regeneration to heal him, etc.). If cornered he will attack with reckless abandon: kicking, biting, punching and smashing until he either wins or is forced to retreat. Troll is a product of both his genetics and environment, making him the dirtiest of street brawlers. He is well known for using large objects (such as dump trucks, immense statues or fast food franchises) as projectiles or melee weapons and will pretty much do anything to get the job done. Troll is also an experienced professional criminal and has the skills to hotwire vehicles, sabotage complex devices, bypass security systems, get information through underworld sources and the like. Troll's combination of power, expertise and instinct make him a formidable opponent.

IN GAME

Lacking the complicated goals and ambitions of most super-villains, Troll is suited to the role of the villain's bodyguard or henchman. He can also be used to fill out the ranks of a team of villains or in his capacity as a super-powered street thug. Troll is also useful for interjecting some action into a slow part of the adventure due to his capacity for quick and unprovoked violence. Here are some ideas for using Troll in your game:

A Night on the Town: After a series of successful jobs, Troll has been living it up. He's been drinking constantly for the past few days and has managed to get himself blitzkrieg drunk. Needless to say, Troll is an angry drunk, so he's out on the town and looking for trouble. The heroes are alerted to Troll's drunken rampage by the police, or hearing about it on the nightly news, or simply by hearing the noise of cars and trucks being tossed to and fro, vehicles and buildings being smashed apart, street lights and power lines crashing to the ground, sirens, explosions, gunfire, alarms, screams, and so forth. Troll is looking to draw out some superheroes for a brawl (and, of course, the PCs oblige). Troll likes to

mix it up and will go all-out in his effort to fight with the heroes. He is, however, looking for a brawl – not a fight to the death – and so will not go for the kill (unless one of the characters really pisses him off), instead he will attempt to incapacitate the heroes. If Troll is tearing the PCs apart, as he is about to deliver a debilitating blow to one of the heroes he will simply pass out. If Troll is badly hurt or getting beaten badly he will try to escape back to whatever he is currently calling home (or where ever he can hide).

If Troll is seriously wounded he will run, giving his regeneration time to do its work before turning to fight again. If the fight goes on too long Troll may start to sober up and become impressed with the heroes' endurance. If suitably impressed, he may invite some or all of the PCs to join him in his revelry. Do the players join him in an attempt to stop the violence (at least for now) or do they reject his offer and risk further enraging a Troll who is now developing a hangover? This can be a fun one-shot combat to break up a slow section of another scenario.

I Swear it was Here a Minute Ago: If the PCs leave their transportation (battle van, motorcycles, etc.) parked in the city while they go off to do some investigating or the like, Troll will happen along and boost it. Troll will take the vehicle on a joyride through town. This can result in some particularly bad PR if the vehicle is recognizable. After his little joyride, he'll hit every chop shop in town trying to unload it. If the vehicle is a recognizable one, the chop shops won't touch it. They'll tell Troll it's just too hot. If Troll can't unload the vehicle, he'll try and ransom it back to the heroes for some exorbitant amount of money.

Cry Terror! Cry Troll!: Dr. Anton Criswell of Advent Labs has long been trying to find gene therapy solutions to unwanted mutations. The debate surrounding the ethical implications of his research has caused Criswell to leave Advent and seek funding in the private sector. Various anti-superhuman interests have given him the funds needed to continue his research in his private lab. While Criswell's goals are to help people who have developed unwanted mutations, the anti-superhuman interests that support him would rather see his research eventually applied to all super-humans. These interests arrange for Troll to be drugged, captured and delivered to Criswell's lab. Criswell refuses to experiment on Troll. His benefactors eventually convince him that Troll is exactly the sort of candidate that would benefit from Criswell's research – a career criminal who could only be "rehabilitated" by the loss of his powers. Criswell reluctantly agrees.

Criswell might've actually been able to rob Troll of his powers, if Troll were a mutant. Troll is not a mutant, however, but an actual Troll, a creature from ancient myth. The serum does quite the opposite; Troll undergoes immediate and violent mutation. He literally explodes out of his restraints. Criswell is thrown clear, but the lab is demolished. A groggy and slightly irritated Troll now stands in the lab wreckage at his new height of fifty feet. Criswell flees the scene and heads towards the heroes. He explains the whole situation, bemoans the terrible mistakes he's made and pleads with the heroes to stop Troll before anyone gets hurt. Meanwhile, Troll has regained his senses and is more than a little amused with his current state. "This is more like it," he thinks and starts heading for downtown.

Troll will do what he's always wanted to do – stomp the crap out of the city as if it were a bad miniature of Tokyo from a Godzilla flick. He's not quite Godzilla-sized, but he'll do his best between fits of the giggles. Troll will topple some smaller structures, climb some or the larger buildings, fling some cars around and rip the "T" off the Advent Labs building to hang it around his neck as an enormous piece of "bling."

Give Troll twelve ranks of Growth and the extras Groundstrike and Shockwave for his Super-Strength and set him loose. The serum will burn out of his system at a dramatically appropriate moment. He will then revert to his normal stature and decry his own dumb luck.

ENDGAME

Since Troll does not really age or get sick, violence is really the only way he can die. But Troll is in a very violent line of work, so if Troll does it will probably be at the hands of the law, probably super-heroes. If he doesn't die, it is possible that his troll parents, for whom he was abducted as an infant, will one day come to collect their wayward son someday. Since trolls become larger and more powerful with age, and they are both more than a millennium old, it will be hard for Troll to resist or for any heroes to stop them. But that is only a future possibility. For now Troll will continue his life as a professional criminal and gangster until something better comes along. Good luck stopping him.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The following hooks can be used to develop scenarios that utilize the characters and organizations presented in this book. You can flesh out these ideas as needed.

MAY-DECEMBER ROMANCE, PART I

The Aspirant (see his entry on page 11) has developed a romantic fixation on Armageddon Girl. Truth to tell, the unstable hero/villain has had feelings for her ever since their first encounter, when he intervened in a battle between her and Troll to prevent them from completely wrecking downtown Chicago. Despite her aged appearance, the Aspirant sees her as a magnetic, sexy woman. He professes his love and tells her that she is a "woman of enormous bearing and power" with the "mature beauty of a warrior-matron". In reality, the Aspirant is unconsciously attracted to the arcane aura that surrounds her – Armageddon Girl still faintly radiates some of the old magic that the Magister (see his entry on page 33) used to create her original amulet, the one that turned her into Annabelle Astounding. This unknown, yet strangely familiar, vibration is what really triggered the Aspirant's romantic interest...that and A-Girl's undeniable raw power. The Aspirant is already

fantasizing about how much easier it will be to attain his grand destiny with such a mate at his side!

Armageddon Girl has actually responded positively to the Aspirant's courtship; something about him seems to calm her simmering rage, while stirring her more sensitive emotions. While she is a little baffled by some of his compliments – his references to her "mature beauty" are at odds with her youthful self-image – she simply chalks that up to the Aspirant's often-grandiose manner of speaking, he likes to make everything sound dramatic and extraordinary. And who knows, perhaps he can sense that she does have the experience and wisdom of a much older woman, maybe he even appreciates that. Perhaps when the time is right she will even share the secret of her Annabelle identity with him, once she is sure he really loves her.

The two have begun actively dating, doing normal, ordinary activities that couples engage in, such as watching DVDs of old movies in the Aspirant's apartment, taking walks in the park, and eating out at family restaurants. Both dress in civilian clothes while doing so, though Armageddon Girl does not actually transform back to her mortal identity. They act just like any other normal couple, as Malcolm Magnus

and Annabelle Watson. This is what ultimately leads to problems.

While A-Girl's appearance has improved considerably since she began dating the Aspirant, she has gone to a day salon, bought some fashionable new clothes, and had her hair professionally styled, she still looks like a seventy-something woman dating a good-looking man of barely thirty. As noted above, Annabelle Watson is under the delusion that when she changes into Armageddon Girl she becomes decades younger and far more attractive, that as A-Girl she truly is a beautiful warrior-matron. At first she brushes off the odd looks and occasional remarks the couple receive when they go out together, but eventually they begin to bother her. Sure, she may look a few years older than Malcolm, he's barely thirty after all, but so what? They still make a handsome couple, and it's not as if she was actually going out with him as Annabelle, after all – she'd never embarrass him like that. What are they sniggering so much at? Why are they being so rude? Can't they see that SHE IS BECOMING ANGRY?

One evening it becomes too much for her to take. While dining together at a posh local eatery, the chic customers begin snickering, pointing, and making easily overheard insults about the mismatched couple. She does not take kindly to the comments, and she also is not mollified by the Aspirant's assurances that he loves her no matter what she looks like; she does not take that as a compliment. Finally, after overhearing one too many "robbing the cradle, aren't you grandma" and "how much is he charging you for the evening" remarks, the increasingly riled Annabelle loses her temper and begins trashing the place, tearing the booths out of the walls, shattering all the windows, and tossing around the staff and patrons like rag dolls. When the police arrive, they receive the same treatment, ending up unconscious and in a heap on the pavement outside. When the PCs make it to the scene they see the Aspirant grappling with an elderly woman in the rubble-strewn interior of the nearly demolished restaurant, apparently assaulting an unfortunate senior citizen. Given the Aspirant's history of erratic behavior the PCs may well make the assumption, that he has gone completely around the bend and act accordingly. If the heroes then attack the Aspirant, Armageddon Girl will at first continue busting up the restaurant, but after a couple of rounds she forgets about all that and sides with her boyfriend against the PCs. If the heroes recognize Armageddon Girl despite her civilian garb and try to take her down instead, the Aspirant will do his best to stay out of the fray, trying instead to "talk down" his girlfriend to end the fight, but if the PCs

actually hurt A-Girl, he'll lose his cool and cut loose against them with everything he's got. Regardless of what else happens, unless the heroes succeed in capturing/defeating her, A-Girl will eventually calm down, take a few verbal shots at her boyfriend for not "being man enough" to defend her honor, and then fly off in a huff.

As far as she is concerned, their relationship is over, but the Aspirant will continue to pursue her.

MAY-DECEMBER ROMANCE, PART II

Still fixated on Armageddon Girl, the Aspirant tries to win her back after the violent quarrel in the restaurant that led to their break-up. Not having much in the way of real experience with relationships, the Aspirant attempts to buy his way back into her heart, sending her expensive gifts and buying newspaper and billboard ads that proclaim his love for her. When he begins to run out of money, he decides to start a new career as a super-bounty hunter, going after supervillains for whom reward money is being offered for their capture. Highly motivated in this endeavor, the Aspirant proves surprisingly effective in the role, putting a score of wanted paranormal criminals behind bars within a matter of weeks. His activities begin receiving a lot of positive media coverage, with reporters speculating that he has finally put his questionable past behind him. Pleased by the attention, the Aspirant even begins donating half of the reward money to various charities.

Everything goes sour when the city museum is robbed of a new arrival, the helmet of Captain Quick – a World War II hero who claimed to have received his speed from the Greek god Hermes. Captain Quick was killed fighting alongside the American army when they pushed into Germany, and his helmet was only recently unearthed in a farmer's field. The robbery fits the Aspirant's old M.O., and the clues at the crime scene are consistent with the Aspirant's cold-flame powers. The Aspirant proclaims his innocence, but soon he is once again a fugitive, and is sought in connection with the burglary.

In fact, the Aspirant did not rob the museum; the theft was the work of a couple of little-known supervillains, identical female twins who call themselves Blue and Grey. Blue has flame powers, and Grey is a telekinetic. They robbed the museum on behalf of a wealthy private collector. When the Aspirant discovers the identities of those responsible for his public disgrace, he sets out to track them down and punish them. Can the heroes stop him from exacting vengeance on Blue and Grey and help him clear his name before he again crosses the line? For an added twist, Armageddon

Girl volunteers to help the heroes find the Aspirant and prove his innocence – she feels guilty about how she’s been treating her boyfriend, and wants to set things right. But do the PCs want a violent, unstable powerhouse working alongside them?

TIME IS RUNNING OUT

Two formerly notorious supervillains, Lady Lethal and Captain Wrath, have come to Midnight Edition (see his entry on page 42) seeking help. Once the brother and sister duo were up-and-comers in the supervillain ranks, but they crossed too many lines too often, bucking the big name syndicates time and again. Eventually their tactics brought retaliation from the established crime bosses. Nether was contracted to put an end to their antics, which she did quite handily. Both became victims of the time-warping power of her touch. Captain Wraith is now a prematurely aged shell of the dashing, handsome rogue he once was, while Lady Lethal is now a skinny, perpetually gawky girl in her early teens, her femme fatale days long over. The two were turned into living examples of what happens to those who move against the “big boys”. Eventually, however, they heard about the rumors of the extortionist who used a very special camera to blackmail the rich and fabulous – a camera that could alter age and appearance. Using their remaining connections and dwindling fortunes, they tracked down the truth behind the rumors and arranged a clandestine meeting with Midnight Edition. Neither had any intention of trying to steal the camera, they simply offered Alex a tidy sum to undo the effects of Nether’s touch. Figuring easy money never hurt, he did just that, and soon the two were back in peak physical condition, ready and eager to go on a major tear through the city.

The problem is that the camera’s effects on Lethal and Wrath have mingled with the residue of the earlier temporal magic, causing time to become very unstable in the vicinity of the pair. Wherever they go time is behaving unpredictably, people and objects around them are suddenly aging, regressing through time, running backwards, and so on. Temporal rifts

have even begun to open up, releasing cavemen, dinosaurs, and androids from the 25th century. This will only cease once the effects of the camera are reversed. As the pair continues their crime wave the situation continues to worsen, as time begins to break down all over the city. The heroes must quell the chaos and panic caused by this at the same time they chase down Lethal and Wrath.

All this increasingly alarms Midnight Edition – he doesn’t care at all about people being hurt or killed of course, but what if the situation leads back to him? He has tried to undo things by burning the photos of Wrath and Lethal as he usually would, but this didn’t work. He is going to have to use the camera to change the pair back to “normal”. This means he’s going to have to confront them, exposing himself to danger and possibly unwanted attention. Accordingly, he calls in a favor, and has Troll accompany him on this mission. Troll is happy to oblige, as Midnight Edition has hooked him up with drugs and women plenty of times, and besides it might be fun. Troll is there to provide cover and deal with any super do-gooders that pop up. Donning a black ski mask and leather gloves to conceal his identity, Midnight Edition and Troll climb into his Jaguar and head to the city, listening to his police scanner, determined to find Lethal and Wrath before any heroes do. To help make sure any superheroes are otherwise occupied, Midnight Edition also begins using his camera to transform people at random. The PCs have to deal with a city gone mad as well as the super-villains!

Use the Costumed Adventurer and the Weapons Master archetypes (see M&M, pages 18 & 23), respectively, to represent Captain Wrath and Lethal Lady, adjusting their power levels as necessary to give the PCs a good fight. The temporal disruption should be treated as plot device, allowing the GM to unleash any time-related trouble desired. Midnight Edition will also gleefully use the camera to transform any heroes that come into range of his lens, so long as he doesn’t have to expose himself to any danger in doing so.

GLOSSARY

In the following section you will find brief descriptions of some of the various characters and organizations that populate the Infiniverse. This should serve to define some of the references made in the preceding character descriptions.

Advent Labs: A superscience think tank and longtime government contractor, Advent Labs is the largest holder of scientific patents in the world. Thomas Hugo Strange, a wealthy philanthropist and scientist who believed technology should serve to better humanity’s way of life, founded Advent

Labs in the late 1940s. Strange operated in the early 1940s as a crimefighter and man of adventure under the name Professor Strange. He used a serum of his own creation called Alosun, a distillate of sun atoms that gave him superhuman strength, the ability to fly, and invulnerability. Strange left Advent Labs to the care of its board of directors in the 1950s to pursue more important matters with his superheroic contemporaries. Since then, Advent Labs has become a worldwide leader in scientific research. Their history of working with superhumans has given Advent Labs close ties to the superhuman community. They are well-respected and have a reputation for confidentiality among superheroes, something that has put them at odds with federal and local law enforcement agencies in the past. However, no one can question their altruistic and peaceful aims.

The Crimson Covenant: Founded in 1932, The Crimson Covenant is an esoteric order of wealthy and hedonistic sorcerers formed by members of the Thule Society. The Covenant was originally formed as a secret cabal within the Thule Society, but its founders were discovered and expelled. They fled to England where they had been in contact with rogue members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. It was in London that the Crimson Covenant made their home, drawing their members from the Golden Dawn and other mystical societies. Their membership was composed entirely of wealthy men and women who sought out the corrupting knowledge and dark arts that were forbidden in their former orders. In the following years, the Covenant became primarily concerned with conquering death. They have discovered numerous necromantic magics and have created necrotechnological devices that have allowed many of them to unnaturally prolong their lives or even live beyond the grave. In recent years, the leaders of the Covenant have been in contact with entities from Beyond, and they now seek to bring an end to life on Earth by merging this plane of existence with the Underworld. Once accomplished, the entities have promised to make the members of the Covenant the rulers of the resulting dimension that will exist forever between life and death.

The Department: Founded after World War II, The Department is a secret U.S. government agency responsible for developing responses to superhuman threats against national security. They research ways to give agents superhuman abilities and they also recruit and train superhumans. The Department is also responsible for training the members of the Superhuman Presidential Protection Team. Over the

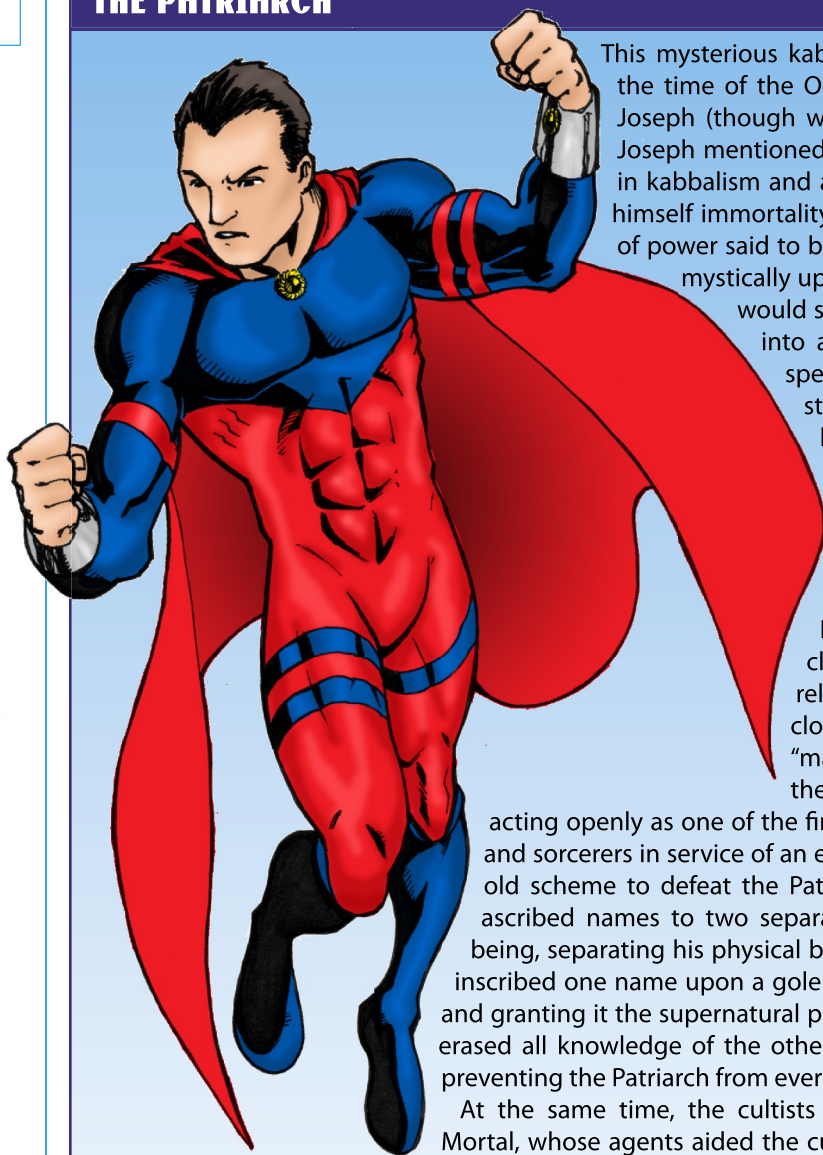
years, they have made efforts to secretly become more and more autonomous and now siphon much of their funding from the unaccountable budget of the Pentagon.

The Fixer: The man known only as The Fixer is a mysterious superhuman who's known for having shady dealings with both superhumans and supervillains. The Fixer usually approaches someone who's having trouble in their heroic or villainous career with an offer of some kind, or an exchange of favors. He is considered to be the greatest problem solver and lateral thinker in the world. The Fixer possesses a four-lobed brain that allows him to perform various mental tasks simultaneously. He is also noted for his eidetic memory, and supernumerary abilities. The Fixer has a mysterious arrangement with the Prime-Mortal, with the Fixer occasionally acting as a go-between, presenting unfortunate heroes or villains with the Prime-Mortal's dubious gifts. That any human being would act as the agent of such an evil entity is incomprehensible to those few heroes aware of this strange relationship.

Infraspac: Simply put, Infraspac is the crawlspace between dimensions. While most dimensional travelers perceive Infraspac as little more than a membrane or barrier between realities, it is possible to become trapped in Infraspac. While it may appear to be an almost infinitesimal gap, once inside travelers discover it to be a limitless void. This void knows no physical or mystical laws and travelers who end up there usually find themselves trapped. Mystics and sorcerers over the ages have reported encounters with vast unearthly entities in the depths of Infraspac. Recently, wayward dimension hoppers have reported being led back to their home dimensions by mysterious beings wielding mystic torches, lighting their way through the impenetrable void.

The New Order: The successors to the Order Without End, the New Order is composed of contemporary sorcerers and mystics who have stepped forward to form a council that watches over the Earthly plane and seek to protect it from any arcane threats.

Null Directorate: A sister agency to the Soviet Union's KGB, the Null Directorate was a top secret Soviet Cold War agency – an offshoot of the KGB that was dedicated to the research and application of superscience and superhuman agents. It was founded after KGB agents acquired the extensive journals and papers of the famed inventor Nikola



This mysterious kabbalist and magician is said to have lived since the time of the Old Testament. Once a mortal Israelite known as Joseph (though whether he is in fact any of the persons named Joseph mentioned in the Bible is unknown), the Patriarch excelled in kabbalism and alchemy to such a great degree that he granted himself immortality. At some point, he discovered an ancient word of power said to be the secret name of God, and scribed this word mystically upon his very soul. By speaking the word aloud, he would summon mystic flames that would transform him into a superhuman being. At some point he began spending most of his time in a pocket dimension, studying the metaphysical nature of the universe, but many times returned to defend his people and humanity in general from supernatural threats. He is known to have defeated the Philistine god Dagon during the time of David, and to have many times foiled the schemes of the undead monster known as the Ghul Lord. During the Renaissance, he became a close friend of the Magister, and despite their religious differences they remain each other's closest allies for centuries. In 1939, inspired by the "masked avengers" who had emerged in America, the Patriarch chose to reveal himself to the world,

acting openly as one of the first superheroes. But in 1940, earthbound cultists and sorcerers in service of an extradimensional evil had completed a centuries-old scheme to defeat the Patriarch. Using blasphemous arcane secrets, they ascribed names to two separate elements of the Patriarch's divinely infused being, separating his physical body from his occult knowledge and power. They inscribed one name upon a golem of clay, wreathing it in fire that does not burn and granting it the supernatural powers of the Patriarch's mystic flame. The cultists erased all knowledge of the other name, even from themselves, in the hopes of preventing the Patriarch from ever reclaiming his power.

At the same time, the cultists gained the assistance of the inhuman Prime-Mortal, whose agents aided the cultists in assassinating all of the Patriarch's living descendants. Each of the Patriarch's descendants had his word of power written in nucleotides across the DNA of every cell in their bodies, and killing them was part of a powerful ritual that would've summoned the extradimensional being they worship to the Earth dimension. However, the Magister managed to save the last three descendants, all orphaned children, and gave them magical amulets made from a strange metal he found in the Patriarch's pocket dimension. These amulets bore powerful cloaking spells that prevented the assassins from finding the children. Using the amulets, the children were able to call upon the Mystic Flame themselves to become the Astounding Trio.

Today, the Patriarch lives under the name Joseph Siegel, and believes himself to be an adventurous archaeologist specializing in ancient Jewish mysticism. He has no idea that he has supernatural powers, and believes he does not age due to drinking from a mystical fountain he found in Ethiopia—he keeps his agelessness a secret to avoid unwanted attention. Until recently, he was hard at work on a study attempting to prove that the inhabitants of Japan are descendants of a lost tribe of Israel, but last year he lost his funding, and the recent death of his beloved wife has left him in a state of despair. He has fallen into obesity and alcoholism. The same spells that robbed him of his memories also left Joseph with an innate distrust of sorcery, and as a result he will work hard to avoid any contact with magicians. But his own knowledge of magic is locked away in the back of his mind, and his word of power is scrawled across his aura. A powerful telepath could help Joseph unearth his hidden memories.

But the cultists watch Joseph, desiring to keep him alive and ignorant. For purposes of their summoning ritual, Joseph must be killed last, after all his descendants are dead, and then their infernal master can manifest itself on Earth. If they suspect costumed heroes or other interlopers are attempting to awaken Joseph to the truth, they will send the Flaming Golem to destroy them. If the Golem were destroyed, Joseph would regain his memories and power, and seek a terrible vengeance against those who had murdered his descendants.

The Patriarch (PL 15)**Str 12/40, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 40, Wis 28, Cha 20**

Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+5), Bluff 8 (+13), Concentration 8 (+17), Craft (artistic) 4 (+15), Diplomacy 8 (+13), Disable Device 4 (+19), Disguise 4 (+9), Drive 4 (+5), Gather Information 4 (+9), Intimidate 12 (+17), Knowledge (arcane lore) 4 (+19), Knowledge (history) 4 (+19), Knowledge (tactics) 4 (+19), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 4 (+19), Profession (Kabbalist) 4 (+13), Search 4 (+19), Sense Motive 4 (+13), Sleight of Hand 4 (+5), Survival 4 (+13),

Feats: Accurate Attack, All-out Attack, Assessment, Defensive Attack, Eidetic Memory, Fearless, Improved Aim, Improved Disarm, Improved Grab, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative 2, Improved Pin, Improved Sunder, Improved Throw, Improved Trip, Jack-of-All-Trades, Precise Shot 2, Quick Change 2, Ritualist, Set-Up, Takedown Attack 2, Trance

Powers: **Blast 15** ("Mystic Flame"; *Power Feats:* Affects Incorporeal, Homing 4, Precise, Reversible, Ricochet, Split Attack; *Extras:* Linked to Disintegrate, Penetrating), **Disintegrate 15** ("Mystic Flame"; *Power Feats:* Affects Incorporeal, Homing 4, Precise, Reversible, Ricochet, Split Attack; *Extras:* Linked to Blast), **Enhanced Strength 28, Immunity 10** (aging, life support), **Protection 13** (*Extras:* Impervious), **Super-Speed 8** (*Power Feats:* Rapid Attack, Alternate Power - **Flight 20**), **Super-Strength 15, Magic 15** (*Power Feats:* Fog of Forgetfulness, Light of Truth, Alternate Power - **Dimensional Pocket 15**, Alternate Power - **Drain 6** [all traits], Alternate Power - **Healing 14** [*Power Feats:* Persistent, Regrowth], Alternate Power - **Super-Movement 15** [Air Walking 2, Dimensional Movement 3, Permeate 3, Sure-footed 4, Trackless, Wall-Crawling 2], Alternate Power - **Transform 5** [anything into anything])

Combat: Attack +11, Grapple +41, Damage +15 (unarmed), Defense +10, Knockback -14, Initiative +9

Saving Throws: Toughness +15, Fortitude +13, Reflex +12, Will +20

Drawbacks: Normal Identity

Totals: Abilities 66 + Skills 25 (100 ranks) + Feats 27 + Powers 323 + Combat 42 + Saves 33 - Drawbacks 3 = 513 PP

The Flaming Golem (PL 15)**Str 12/40, Dex 12, Con -, Int -, Wis 28, Cha -**

Feats: Accurate Attack, All-out Attack, Defensive Attack, Improved Grab, Improved Grapple, Improved Initiative 2, Improved Pin, Improved Sunder, Improved Throw, Takedown Attack 2

Powers: **Blast 15** ("Mystic Flame"; *Power Feats:* Affects Incorporeal, Homing 4, Precise, Reversible, Ricochet, Split Attack; *Extras:* Linked to Disintegrate, Penetrating), **Disintegrate 15** ("Mystic Flame"; *Power Feats:* Affects Incorporeal, Homing 4, Precise, Reversible, Ricochet, Split Attack; *Extras:* Linked to Blast), **Enhanced Strength 28, Immunity 40** (aging, fortitude saves, life support), **Protection 13** (*Extras:* Impervious), **Super-Strength 15**

Combat: Attack +11, Grapple +41, Damage +15 (unarmed), Defense +10, Knockback -14, Initiative +9

Savings Throws: Toughness +15, Fortitude -, Reflex +12, Will +20

Totals: Abilities -8 + Skills 0 (0 ranks) + Feats 12 + Powers 275 + Combat 42 + Saves 24 = 345 PP

Joseph Siegel* (PL 3/10)**Str 12, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 24, Wis 24, Cha 20**

Skills: Acrobatics 4 (+5), Bluff 8 (+13), Concentration 8 (+15), Craft (artistic) 4 (+11), Diplomacy 8 (+13), Disable Device 4 (+11), Disguise 4 (+9), Drive 4 (+5), Gather Information 4 (+9), Intimidate 12 (+17), Knowledge (arcane lore) 4 (+11), Knowledge (history) 4 (+11), Knowledge (tactics) 4 (+11), Knowledge (theology and philosophy) 4 (+11), Profession (Kabbalist) 4 (+11), Search 4 (+11), Sense Motive 4 (+11), Sleight of Hand 4 (+5), Survival 4 (+11)

Feats: Artificer, Assessment, Eidetic Memory, Fearless, Improved Aim, Improved Disarm, Improved Trip, Jack-of-All-Trades, Precise Shot 2, Quick Change 2, Ritualist, Set-Up, Trance

Powers: **Immunity 1** (aging), **Magic 15** (*Power Feats:* Fog of Forgetfulness, Light of Truth, Alternate Power - **Dimensional Pocket 15**, Alternate Power - **Drain 6** [all traits], Alternate Power - **Healing 14** [*Power Feats:* Persistent, Regrowth], Alternate Power - **Super-Movement 15** [Air Walking 2, Dimensional Movement 3, Permeate 3, Sure-footed 4, Trackless, Wall-Crawling 2], Alternate Power - **Transform 5** [anything into anything])

Combat: Attack +5, Grapple +6, Damage +1 (unarmed), Defense +5, Knockback -1, Initiative +1

Saving Throws: Toughness +2, Fortitude +7, Reflex +6, Will +12

Drawbacks: Normal Identity

Totals: Abilities 46 + Skills 25 (100 ranks) + Feats 15 + Powers 40 + Combat 20 + Saves 15 - Drawbacks 3 = 158 PP

"*" Joseph Siegel is the Patriarch's normal identity (as per the drawback). Though he possesses the power Magic at 15 ranks in this form, currently he does not remember that he has this power. He will not recall these abilities unless his memories are recovered telepathically or the Flaming Golem is destroyed. Without his magic, Joseph Siegel is effectively PL 3.

Tesla after his death in 1943. The Directorate was also responsible for the procurement and development of alien technology, much of which was recovered from crash sites around the Soviet Union, the most of important find having already been recovered by the military decades earlier after the Tunguska event of 1908. Dedicated to the security of the USSR, the Null Directorate dealt mainly in research and development, but was also had espionage, counter-intelligence, and paramilitary branches. They had research facilities, agents (both mundane and superhuman), spy-nests, and underground networks all over the globe, which brought them into conflict with espionage and security agencies of numerous other countries. After the fall of the USSR, the Null Directorate found itself on shaky ground. With its funding cut, the Directorate sought out other sources of income, which involved selling technology, weapons and intelligence secrets of the Cold War. They also became involved in manufacturing weapons and narcotics, using the now unfettered Russian mob to handle the distribution. As the Directorate's networks of agents became more fragmented as they were shut down or suffered huge cuts in their budgets, many departments and cells went rogue and were in some cases absorbed into criminal organizations such as F.R.A.M.E. Despite this, Null Directorate survived and is rebuilding its strength. It now operates as a semi-autonomous shadow agency that acts in supposed concern for the current Russian government and other allied provinces, but in reality is more concerned with self-preservation and the expansion of its power base. Null Directorate programs are responsible for developing Tesla's theories on power broadcasting. A technology that gave rise to the Electroportation belt and the Lightning Gun, both employed by Null Directorate operative, Agent Zero. Tesla's designs for an atomic robot also formed the basis for the *Snegurochka* project.

Obscurium: A strange super-metal that many scientists believe isn't native to Earth. It can be found in few places in the world, and is most prevalent in California's Santa Obscura where it was first discovered and from whence it gets its name. In recent years industries have sprung up in Santa Obscura that specialize in the location and extraction of Obscurium and greater quantities of the metal are being produced than ever before. The metal is known for its extreme strength when made into the right alloy, and its conductive and malleable properties when used in advanced scientific applications, like those being researched at Advent Labs.

The Order Without End: The Order was originally an assemblage of the most formidable mystics on the mortal plane. Over the centuries they worked to protect Earth from arcane and mystical threats, but their primary purpose was to chose, from amongst the Earth's collection of sorcerers and magicians, the best candidate for the role of Earth's Archadepth Arcane. Their last choice, the wizard Ibrahim, served in good stead for centuries and during those years the Order did little more than serve as advisors the Archadepth Arcane. The last surviving members of the Order perished fighting the entity from Beyond known as the Chronophage.

Santa Obscura: A medium-sized city in California's central valley, Santa Obscura is notable for its high crime rate and being one of the only places in the world where the rare super-metal Obscurium can be found. In recent years studies have Santa Obscura to have a higher rate of reported superhumans among adolescents and young adults than anywhere in the United States.

Thule Society: In the real world, the Thule Society was a German occultist and völkisch group founded in Munich in 1918. They are notable for sponsoring the German Worker's Party, which Hitler later transformed into the Nazi Party. However, Hitler later suppressed the Thule Society in order to avoid the embarrassment of his party being associated with an occultist organization. In the Infiniverse, however, beyond their political leaning and anti-Semitic rhetoric, the Thule Society at its core was a collection of magicians and sorcerers. While they left the public eye during Hitler's rise to power, they remained in existence as a secret cabal of wizards who answered only to their Nazi leaders. They opposed the heroic mystics and magicians of the Allied forces throughout the Second World War.

The Underworld: A catchall phrase used by mystics and other enlightened individuals to describe the honeycomb of dimensions and planes of existence that are home to the dark and evil beings of the multiverse. There are dimensions in the Underworld that resemble, and may in fact be, the hell described in the Judeo-Christian beliefs. Sorcerers, wizards and magicians have long been able to strike bargains with beings from the underworld (which is typically the only way these beings can gain entry to our dimension) to bring them into our world to do their bidding.

The Wallachian: The Wallachian is the chosen title of an extremely old and powerful vampire from the Carpathian Mountains that claims to be the Voivod of Wallachia. His true name is unknown, though many theories abound. During WWII, the Wallachian was allied with Nazi Germany and played a vital role in many of the Third Reich's super-soldier programs. He was defeated by the allied super-spy, the Blue Phantom, and has only recently reemerged after decades of inactivity. (You'll be able to see more of The Wallachian in the upcoming BFG release entitled *Mansion of the Macabre*)

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