

Lullaby for Insomniac

HEARTS & SOULS EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Hi, I'm Tim, and I want to explain how H&S works a little bit. I will be playing the role of "The Moth" for a mini-adventure setup by my "Editor," a.k.a Ed.

My character sheet:

The Moth

Real Name: Unrevealed

Drive: Community

Might: Exceptional

Deftness: Spectacular

Resilience: Exceptional

Brains: Ordinary

Prowess: Exceptional

Resolve: Exceptional

Powers

Flight: The Moth can fly at Ordinary air speeds (about the speed of a real moth or average bird in flight), thanks to the specialized technology of his cloak and costume. His flight appears much like gliding when active, but is actually full flight.

Gadgets: Thanks to numerous pockets, pouches, and compartments (both obvious and hidden throughout his costume), The Moth has access to many small, often single-use, gadgets at a moment's notice. These devices all have Exceptional rank. Some examples are:

Attack: Exceptional (Shuriken-like "Razorwings")

Defense: None

Movement: Exceptional (Tanglewire Net, designed to hinder a foe's movements)

Manipulation: Ordinary (Remote/Radio override devices.)

Mask: Built into his cowl is a heavy mask that provides Nightvision, automatic flare compensation (to protect from bright lights), and a gas mask. The mask and its features have Spectacular Rank.

Now "The Moth" is a street-level hero. This is pretty easy to grasp, because he doesn't have a single superhuman or cosmic-scaled ability.

Tim: This is going to be tough work for my hero, I suspect!

Ed: Bah! You worry too much. This will be fun. You ready? Stop drooling over the Invulnerability power!

Tim: Yeah, I'm ready.

Ed: [smirking at me] Bwahaha

Tim: That doesn't fill me with confidence.

Ed: BWAHAHAHA-HA!

Tim: Oh boy.

Ed: This is going to be simple, in order to give the fine folks out there a grasp of the game. HI, FOLKS!

Tim: HI!

Ed: Not you.

Tim: Oh.

Ed: [Setting the scene]: It has been a quiet night for your dutiful patrol of the city of Luna Bay. The buildings, tall and weather worn, stand tangled amidst water and ash.

Tim: Ash?

Ed: Factories spew smoke and pollution across what was once a fair city and it settled into a gray dismal ash here and there.

Tim: This isn't very exciting; perhaps I can tune in a football game on my radio. I think I'll listen to police band instead.

Ed: You have a radio?

Tim: Yep, I pull it from my pouch. See? A police band radio is one of my gadgets.

Ed: Ah, very good. No need to roll for

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something like that!

Tim: So, anything good? Good guys up by 7?

Ed: It's quiet. Wait! Suddenly, the police scanner squawks. You're familiar with the lingo, having done this a while.

Tim: So, what is it?

Ed: Hostage situation, they don't name the company, just give an address: 1478 Moliver, but that is Pharmichem, a hi-tech drug company.

Tim: Alright, [getting fully into this character] I leap backwards into the air using my cloak to soar over the roof top behind me, curling and spinning as I fly to orient myself before winging over to Pharmichem.

Ed: You get there briskly, buffeted half-heartedly by stray gusts of winds under the clouds in the sky.

Tim: What do I see?

Ed: Pharmichem is one of those luxurious industrial park affairs; mostly offices by the looks of it, but out here in the industrial park, it probably has labs as well. Police cars semi-circle the building, strewn in half-barricade-half-shooting gallery. Their lights flash brightly. An ambulance and a fire truck also stand watch. Only one floor is lit, somewhere in the mid-30's and a man can be seen holding someone hostage.

Tim: Is he armed?

Ed: Yes, he's holding a pistol. Give me a Brains roll.

Tim: What do I roll? Ordinary Rank, Human Scale?

Ed: 1d4

Tim: That's ALL!?

Ed: Don't worry about it... just roll.

Tim: [rolling die and announcing result] A 2. Darn!

Ed: From here, your nightvision gives you an edge. You see that the man is dressed in what appears to be a police uniform.

Tim: Police? Good.

Ed: No, he is holding a woman hostage, waving a gun about.

Tim: He's a security guard, isn't he?

Ed: Possibly. Similar enough uniforms in nightvision green.

Tim: All right, here's what I'm going to do.

Ed: Ok, do tell.

Tim: I will fly up and arc high, then aim dead at the window, and slam into it full force in an attempt to break it and tackle the guy.

Ed: What about the woman?

Tim: I'm going to try and protect her from the glass as best I can. A few stray shards are better than a bullet. I hope.

Ed: Fair enough. [Considers for a moment] Roll Deftness, you're an agile fighter, not a strong one and your mass alone will break the glass... if it is glass... [Ominous glare]

Tim: Deftness is Spectacular. What do I roll this time?

Ed: 3d4 [The Ed uses the standard Challenge Rating of 2 for this scale of tasks]

Tim: Alright. [Rolls] I got a 1, 1 and 1. A 3 [Aghast] I screwed up.

Ed: No, use your monologue, and don't add, only take the highest die.

Tim: Right! "Community" which means I want to belong, support the community, and show it how to excel, right?

Ed: If that's what it means to you.

Tim: You're no help.

Ed: Yeah, I know. It's my lot in life.

Tim: [thinking quickly] "I can't falter so soon. I'm a part of this community. I have to pull myself together and take my stand here; show them that anyone can be a hero, and I can't do that if I fail!"

Ed: Done. Reroll!

Tim: [rolls furiously] Come on 12, I mean 4's! 2, 2, and 3.

Ed: A 3, huh? That's quite good for humans, you know! You smash the glass easily and it breaks into tiny, harmless shards that clatter about the faux marble floor. The guard is startled and wild-eyed. It doesn't look like he's slept for days, maybe weeks.

Tim: Can't get good help, I guess.

Ed: Your tackle knocks him down That is a freebie because he's surprised. He is, of course, stressed, meaning he takes 1 stress from your action.

Tim: Just 1?

Ed: Yep. Unless a Stress Trigger is involved.

Tim: Ok, well I'm not stopping there. I am going to slam the gun out of his hand.

Ed: All right, since he is startled, Roll again, but that sounds like a Might-based strike.

Tim: [wanting to use his higher score] Fine, then I'll just aim a careful martial arts strike and try and knock him out.

Ed: Roll Dexterity, since you are being picky.

Tim: You would be too if you were me. [rolls dice] 3, 1, and 4!

Ed: The blow land rapidly, and he takes another

point of stress, for a total of 2! That's good enough for this average joe. Your strike lands accurately and he collapses unconscious on the floor.

Tim: I check on the woman, oh wait, I grab the gun, chuck it out the window, then check on the woman.

Ed: Why?

Tim: Just in case he wakes up.

Ed: The woman is panicked and terrified, she's shaking but doesn't look to be in shock. "Y-You, you're him... the Mothman! The..the.."

Tim: "No, no relation. Besides, I think he's East Coast and I'm all about the West. I'm The Moth, and I'm just here to help you, miss."

Ed: All right, you can drop that stress point of yours; because of the joke.

Tim: Ha! I don't have any.

Ed: Too bad. Guess we need to fix that. The woman trembles a bit. "You've got to help them...he's got them! He's crazy..!"

Tim: [muttering] And this guy wasn't...?

Ed: [as the woman] "No, no that's our security guard, Jacob. He's normally so nice, such a sweet man. But him, that other man, that crazy man, he made him crazy too, I don't know how! SOB!"

Ed: What do you do?

Tim: "Get out of sight if you can. I'll go look into this."

Ed: "He's crazy, I...I..."

Tim: "Don't worry. You did well. You held it together. I'll be fine. You stay safe."

Ed: Nice!

Tim: Ok, so I'm going to sneak down the hall quietly. This was the only place visibly lit right?

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Ed: Yes.

Tim: Good.

Ed: The corridor is lit well by hospital style lights, a few flicker more than as is typical. Ahead, you can hear voices, but can't quite tell where from. They could be dead ahead, or off to either the left or right branches.

Tim: Do I see anything?

Ed: Nope, just long corridors each way.

Tim: [Thinking hard] I look at the floor. Are there any markings?

Ed: Not that you see. Roll Brains. [The Ed uses the standard Challenge Rating of 2 for this scale of tasks]

Tim: I got a 2.

Ed: You notice that the doors along one hallway are all opened about a quarter of the way. Not much to go on, but in the other two directions, they're shut.

Tim: And I hear voices, and likely these rooms have good sound proofing because of "ultra secret corporate espionage" right?

Ed: Good idea, maybe.

Tim: Well, I'm going to move down the hall, watching for shadows through the edges of the doors.

Ed: About three doors in, you see some movement. It is just a momentary shadow behind a partially opened door.

Tim: I listen at the door

Ed: Somewhat further away sounding from beyond that door—comes voices. "Hehe, yeah, the boss wants you all to know he is glad for your service to his cause, each and every one of you. He just wants you to know how good it is, how wonderful it is, to be like him." A second voice cries out, "You're nuts!" A baby starts crying.

Tim: A baby? Here? At this time of night? What the heck?

Ed: A baby all the same.

Tim: All right, I'm headed in, quickly and quietly.

Ed: Roll Prowess.

Tim: I didn't ask, what the heck is Prowess?

Ed: It represents skill.

Tim: I have one skill?

Ed: No you have many, really too many to bother writing up on a pc sheet plus you, as a superhero, skills are kinda malleable. Prowess covers how broad your mental skill-knowledge is.

Tim: Oh. And Physical skills are...? Isn't stealth physical?

Ed: Deftness covers physical skills, and in this case I feel its the mental aspect that is important. Another time I may ask for Deftness for stealth. I do have a reason. Sound ok to you? [The Ed uses the standard Challenge Rating of 2 for this scale]

Tim: Sure! [Rolls dice] 3 and 1.

Ed: You only really need to tell me the high one.

Tim: Now you tell me.

Ed: You think you are quiet. And you move down another hall beyond the door. Several doors to either side and glass windows into dark rooms. These look like medical labs of some sort.

Tim: A drug company, right?

Ed: Yeah.

Tim: Do I see the speakers?

Ed: Ahead, you see about a dozen people sitting in the floor. Two men pace back and

forth in front of them. They glance up across the larger room through one of the glass windows, and then back at the hostages.

Tim: Great. Two of them....

Ed: That you see.

Tim: What do the hostages look like? Are they all alive?

Ed: Yeah, they look very, very tired and strung out. So do the two men guarding them.

Tim: These two guards, they have guns, right?

Ed: Now that you mention it, both have shoulder slung SMGs.

Tim: Oh, I take it they aren't security then?

Ed: No, they're hired goon sorts. Only crazy and wild eyed.

Tim: I have this nauseating gas launcher... I'll show 'em.

Ed: [in sing song voice] You have hostages that will get hit too, and one of them is a baby.

Tim: My bad. Fine, I'm going to take a razorwing and fling it at the light switch, shorting them out and making it dark. Then, I'll leap into the room to kick one guy and punch the other.

Ed: Well the first action is fine, but the other two will cost you 1 extra stress, because you're doing so much on panel.

Tim: Deftness for all three actions?

Ed: Yep. [The Ed uses the standard Challenge Rating of 2 for this scale of tasks]

Tim: 3, 2, 1 are my rolls. Aloud I say, "You will not win, for I am the Moth, one of the many who stand for justice in this community."

Ed: That's for the last roll right?

Tim: Yeah, unless the others need a reroll too?

Ed: No

Tim: DOH! I got a 1 again... and now I have 2 stress!

Ed: Are you going to try again?

Tim: I'm not going to push it.

Ed: Ok, the lights go black when your razorwing slams into the switch with an electric crackle. You leap in and kick one of the thugs. The other steps just out of reach and you miss! In the darkness, the first thug opens fire! The staccato sound of the SMG rips through the air. I'm triggering your stress; even though it's dark he still manages to hit you. The bullet hits and tears through your hip. This will give you a stress trigger for actions requiring footwork and you're now bleeding heavily.

Tim: OUCH. I don't have time for this, and the people are in danger. I take out and throw two razor wings, trying to jam up the barrel of Mr. trigger happy, all the while trying to stay out of the way of the other one. Deftness or Attack from gadget?

Ed: Whichever is highest, or your choice if you really WANT to use the low one, I'm fine with that. [Evil Grin--The Ed uses the standard Challenge Rating of 2 for this scale of tasks]

Tim: No, no, a 4!

Ed: Your moth shaped razorwings slash out in a whisper of sound. One slams into the barrel with a clang partially embedding itself there. The other razorwing jams into the cartridge eject rendering the gun inoperable!

Tim: ROCK ON!

Ed: The other one is trying to find you. What do you do?

Tim: I'm going to use my flight to get quietly out of the way.

Ed: Roll Flight as a dodge.

Tim: Eep! It's only Ordinary.

Ed: Roll 1d4, please. [The Ed uses the standard Challenge Rating of 2 for this scale of tasks]

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Tim: I rolled a 3.

Ed: Good enough. You move out of the way of both of them, as they don't think to look up.

Tim: All right, now I'm going to drop on the one with the still-working gun and try and take him out. Any way I can get that done without him getting another turn?

Ed: You can drop behind him and then intimidate him. If you beat both task ratings, that'll be enough stress to trigger a setback.]

Tim: I'll do that then!

Ed: All right, Might for the grapple from behind, and then a Resolve for the intimidation. [The Ed uses the standard Challenge Rating of 2 for this scale of tasks]

Tim: 3 for the grab, and 2 for the intimidation. Whispering in his ear "I have you and there is nowhere you can go that the Moth can't find you, fluttering always just there by the light, watching you..."

Ed: He trembles at your words and your strength. What setback would you like?

Tim: Oh? I pick? Then I want him to run in fear and turn himself in.

Ed: "I'm getting out of here! I don't want to work for him no more!" he struggles until you let go and flees off down the hall. The gun strapped to him forgotten.

Tim: Where's the other one?

Ed: A voice almost sings, "Look out behind you.."

Tim: Wait, someone said that?"

Ed: Yes.

Tim: I dodge. Deftness, right? I got a 1 for all three [groans]! I'm in for it. [groans more] And I took stress for it even without a reroll! I'm not going to try again.

Ed: His ram doesn't land full on. You almost get out of the way. 1 more stress as you stagger a bit, but no stress events at least.

Tim: Good! I try and shake off his ram and, just strike him hard in the solar plexus with the palm of my hand.

Ed: Deftness or Might?

Tim: If i can avoid more stress, Might, my leg and hip are hurting too badly to worry about finesse.

Ed: I like the way you put that. Deftness might, fancy martial arts can strain you, but a solid left hook won't hurt your hip, as much. [The Ed uses the standard Challenge Rating of 2 for this scale of tasks]

Tim: 2 for my result.

Ed: You strike him hard, but he's still moving fast enough to roll off most of the blows power. He takes stress. He returns with a one-two punch at you.

Tim: I hate to do this, but I am going to try and rapidly dodge back behind him. I roll Deftness and get a 3.

Ed: You still manage it, taking stress of course. The agony is solid now, but you get behind him avoiding his strike.

Tim: As I step past I will drive my elbow at the back of his head. Deftness roll says 4 for the result.

Ed: I take it you want him to fall down on his face if you succeed and not get up for a while?

Tim: Yes!

Ed: You hear a solid crunch from the elbow strike and feel the heavy jolt and he goes down face forward. "hehehe...Very nice," says the mysterious voice.

Tim: Oh. I turn and look for it. Please be a hostage!

Ed: Standing behind you, as blood trickles

down your leg and into your boot, is a man who is tall and lean. He has wild hair, spiky, longish, and it is sticking up in every direction. You see that he has one brown eye and one blue eye, neither bloodshot nor black and puffy-eyed from lack of sleep. "Hi, who are you? Nice cape. Can I get one? You really shouldn't be here. The people are not sleeping as they should be." he waves in a cheerful manner—disturbingly cheerful, in fact. Wrapped around his neck is a lab coat, tied very much like some upscale preppy draped with a sweater in true high nose, blue blood fashion. The whole image is surreal, shaken back to morbid truth by the blood that stains it.

Introducing, The Insomniac.

Here are the stats, which I didn't get to see during the game:

The Insomniac

Drive: Hatred

Might: Ordinary! [4]

Deftness: Exceptional [2]

Resilience: Ordinary! [4]

Brains: Spectacular [2]

Prowess: Exceptional [2]

Resolve: Spectacular [2]

Powers

Immunity to Sleep: Nothing can put this guy into sleep, though he can be knocked out.

The Insomniac, for all his madness, is a genius and seems to possess an almost superhuman ability to attract followers in the form of thugs who serve him loyally. They often tend to grow madder in his presence but this has more to do with the fact he never stops talking, and he talks faster than most states' legal speed limit. Added to his sleeplessness, he seems to be a living vector for insanity.

Stress Trigger: Lullabies enrage the Insomniac making him lose control and focus. The stress event it most commonly causes is Rage.

In Hearts & Souls, there is a shorthand way to write the attributes used above. Instead of saying, "The Insomniac possesses

Superhuman Might," we say simply, "Might: Ordinary!" (The exclamation point indicating that it's superhuman scale) and the word "Ordinary" to indicate that while at that scale it's nothing truly exceptional-within its own scale. The shorthand for cosmic is an asterisk, (a star if you will) and for human scale we just leave the word alone.

Now back to the game!

Tim: [wide-eyed] Uh ...

Ed: "You've come to play our little game? Doesn't matter what you do though; waking or sleeping, walking or dreaming, it always ends the same, everyone dead... Teehee."

Tim: "Not with me around!"

Ed: "Oh? You again? I thought you were a dream. Dreams still come and go, and go away, you know they fray the carpet as you walk across it." he giggles at you again.

Tim: "You will stop this and let these people go!"

Ed: "Not around, pound of flesh, feather weighs more? You? Not like we didn't see this coming did we, did you? So you did? Guess so? Don't know...You are so going to die, NOW!" With that, he spins backwards and leaps into the air, a half-dozen feet above you and plants his hands on your shoulders to handspring himself through the air. You can try and stop him.

Tim: I jump after him and try and grab his wrist! Might, 1.

[Ed consults the Insomniac's character sheet and sees that he has two superhuman traits. That means when The Moth rolls against the Insomniac in a challenge, the standard challenge rating will be a 4 versus those traits!]

Ed: That won't be a good enough monologue. [The Ed compared the Might score to the task number which is opposed by Insomniac's Deftness in this case a 2.]

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Tim: "I can't let this loon escape. He'd hurt people, tearing down what they've built in trust and faith in me." The new result is a 4.

Ed: Good, but not good enough. Because you need to have enough stress to cause a setback. He takes stress because you were so fast though! You grab at his wrist and catch only the edges of the lab coat, which falls away. As he lands he grabs a dagger length of shatter glass and smiles while licking the edge.

Tim: He's freaky.

Ed: "Run, Run, Fast you as can, can't catch me, the Insomniac, sleep makes you weak little fluttery bug, bug, bug, little ladybug dancing on the lilies snuggety snug!" he giggles again disturbingly girlish. He leaps at you and spins in the air, driving the dagger shard of glass at your eye.

Tim: I dodge back, falling to my knees to make him over shoot. My Deftness result is 2. [wince] Somehow, I suspect that won't cut it. [The Moth needs a 4 to avoid the attack because Insomniac is using his best score, Might for this attack]

Ed: He slashes at you, diving for the black eye of your mask. He destroys the black orb and the lenses within, tearing down to your face and driving you painfully to the ground. Stress event: Mask Destroyed. Can't use its features like nightvision. Fortunately, Insomniac can't see well in the dark either.

Tim: I look up at him, growl, and roll back, throwing him back and pushing with both legs. I know I'll take more stress but I have to get him away from me. The Might roll is 3.

Ed: Yep, Might. You roll out of his way, trying to throw him, but he uses that to launch himself against the wall to land back on the lab counter. [Tim's roll was good enough since Insomniac can't really defend with Might at this time. That's more appropriate to wrestling, or holds.]

Tim: He took stress?

Ed: Yep. He grabs something from the table and begins mixing chemicals, ignoring you momentarily. The people have been quiet in the dark, but the sounds of battle have awoken the baby to cry again, it's squawking and the mother begins singing, "Hush little baby don't..." The Insomniac suddenly begins yelling! He smashes the glass beakers down and turns. "NO, NO, NO! NOT THAT! NOT THAT! IT'S YOUR FAULT!" He seems to be yelling at you. The baby continues to cry and the mother sings.

Tim: I've got no stress right yet?

Ed: 1 for the Might thing you did use your pained leg.

Tim: I stand up and look at him fully and wait for him. "Yes it's my fault... what are you going to do about it?"

Ed: "I hate you, hate everything about your world, about the cars, and drugs, and voices yammering all hours, all day, always I hated it, and I hate you!" [Ed uses a Monologue to push back the Insomniac's stress.] He leaps again right at you, the blade lashing out in a wide arc, slashing at your costume.

Tim: I'm leaping back out of the way. It hurts, but it's all I can do. Roll 4.

Ed: You get out of the way of his strikes and he keeps coming. "Die, figment, wither on the vine, fade away fade away like the often-spilled wine!" he giggles shaking his whole body with it again.

Tim: I drive two quick jabs to his throat. "Stop yammering, you chatterbox! This isn't 1-900-LUNATIC."

Ed: Hehe, drop the stress point for that. What was your roll? I need one for the jabs.

Tim: Oh 3. Can I trigger a setback, stress event?

Ed: Nope. Currently, his hatred monologue has him going. You added stress not covered by that, however. The sound of the singing voice of the woman is hushing the child. Insomniac

turns and throws the glass shard not at you, but at the mother!

Tim: Hell no! I... I leap in front of it!

Ed: You'll take it in the chest? Accept the injury it will potentially cause? You aren't especially bullet or glass-shard proof you know?

Tim: Yeah! I do it anyway!

Ed: Roll Deftness.

Tim: Got a 3.

Ed: The glass shard flies across the room. Your body bars its way, the sound of it as it tears into your flesh echoes in your ears. You had 1 stress from the Deftness roll, and this would definitely cause another for accepting the wound, which could be triggered to hurt you. Except, of course, your damn heroic self gets a point shaved for the risk. So, the shard slams into your shoulder.

Tim: I stand up, pull it out, toss it aside, and walk towards the loon. "I stand for the common man... as one of many always there, always seeking to belong to that common courage of mankind. You will not break this." I want to punch him and I want to awe him with the fact that I'm still standing after all this. Resolve 3, Might 2. I want him to go down hard.

Ed: Your fierceness and courage drive him back as you add another point of stress. As you wanted he fails to dodge the oncoming blow and it lands solid, taking him out before he can spew more bile of mad hatred! [The Ed's running total of stress for Insomniac is rather high because of the Insomniac's Stress Trigger, and no more monologues were forthcoming this time!]

Tim: Nurse?!

Ed: On the way out, the hostages are escorted to the ambulance. You quickly make your way above the crowd of onlookers, police, and reporters. With your mask damaged, you wouldn't want to give away who you were, and so you vanish into the night. As you soar away, you hear the strains of a lullaby being

sung to a child, and the Insomniac's voice again screaming, "Nooo!"



The Editor's Bullpen

BUILDING A HEART & SOULS COMIC BOOK

The Pitch

There is a reason we use the term Ed. instead of one of the more common terms. We wish to shift the focus of the game so that both the players and the Ed. can create the plot and story elements together. The first step is the Pitch. Usually in the course of gaming, the Ed. or a player comes up with an idea for "comic book" and presents it to the others in the gaming group. The pitch is the basic idea of the themes the game will cover, as well as a small piece of the setting, and the types of characters that best fit into it.

A Pitch is not the final state of the game. It is simply an initial attempt to gain interest and feedback so that the Ed. and the players can build a game together to work at its best for the group.

Sample Pitches

- A team of explorers experiences a bizarre phenomenon that imbues them with strange and alien abilities. Now they find a need to use those powers to further human freedom and science.
- Children blessed with talents and skill beyond their peers escape from a criminal faction of the government intent on exploiting their abilities and discover a strange world beyond the only home they've ever known.
- A great threat arrives to conquer the world. Heroes long retired must re-build their legendary status and train replacements who will take up the challenge as the next generation of the team.
- Alien refugees arrive on earth, seeking asylum and allies against a terrible foe who's driven them from their home worlds.

Some elements of pitches that help create an aid to play should not be overlooked.

Why do the heroes work together?

Common Enemy

Heroes have a common foe, so working together is most likely in their own best interests.

Common Origin

The heroes' abilities derive from the same event or same source. If this occurs simultaneously, they may even be at the same place when they gain their abilities.

Common Drives

This is perhaps one of the subtler reasons why heroes get together. Community is the most common reason, but the other drives can also put people together.

Great Need

They recognize the need to work together to thwart evil, that each alone simply can't do it.

How do the heroes work?

Government Sponsor

Someone puts the weight of the government behind their team. They may be police, special ops, or any of a number of variations.

Outlaws

The heroes are not evil, but they do operate outside, or beyond, most laws—apprehending criminals as vigilantes, being chased for crimes they didn't commit, and so on.

Societal Support

In this variation, society doesn't look askance at the heroes. Either they've earned respect, or the tradition of previous heroes has gained a bit of acceptance. This is more common in worlds where supers have been established for some time or the need for heroes was great.

Fear and Loathing

Beyond mere outlaws, the very nature of super-heroes make people afraid. They are forced to operate in secret, skirting society, or skulk through it in an attempt to hide exactly who or what they are.

How do the Heroes Dress?

Uniforms

Perhaps the heroes belong to a military organization, or simply wish to give a common image of solidarity, or perhaps they got their clothes in bulk from a wholesaler. It all means that they dress roughly alike.

Costumes

Costumes are one of the more traditional elements of comic books. The visual medium lends itself well to such brightly colored accouterments. In recent years it's become passé to dress up in spandex or other tight variation of the fighting togs. There are good reasons, depending on other elements of the Pitch, why this may be useful. Veiling identity, intentionally making oneself an obvious target—AKA the “Hey look, I’m a super-hero!” rule—all serve to be an impetus for making costumes a viable option, although it presumes a certain amount of thought and conviction on the hero’s part. Recently costumes have become more leather-like and trendy— trench coats rather than hip boots and capes, but it’s still fundamentally the same idea. She’s put on her leather pants, so it’s time for some smack-down action!

Regular Duds

Normal everyday work-and-play wear. This isn’t as sexy, sleek or fun for most of us as costumes or uniforms, but some people just insist that comfort overrides style. It’s cheap, it’s affordable, and—without special supernatural/super-tech materials—it makes a lot more sense than the costumes. But even regular duds can have some flair—say, a cool domino mask and a fedora.

How do the Heroes get along?

This element really breaks down to a far smaller and much less manageable degree than the others. Individual heroes work differently with one another. Some heroes work together out of necessity and can barely stand each other outside “work.” Others are a family, either in the traditional literal sense

or of a more emotional support variation. No matter what it should, be considered that a hero doesn’t exist in a vacuum, and how he works and plays with his allies does matter. A hero who can’t work with the rest of the group should be rewritten or replaced. That doesn’t mean toss her aside just because she creates a little conflict! It just means that a character so diametrically opposed to the rest of the group will end up making the other heroes, and their players, miserable. Conflict is good; conflict that threatens the fun and cohesion of the heroes every game session is bad. So, toss it out.

What to do with the Heroes?

What is really important is, what you wish to do with the heroes, that is, what kind of stories you want to explore with them? Are they seekers finding new worlds full of injustice? Are they grim avengers of the night attempting to end the tyranny of drug runners over their home city? The tales the Ed. and players want to create together are vital, shaping both how the heroes operate and the background elements that forge their current path.

Pitching a No-Hitter

Sometimes a Pitch simply doesn’t work. You may need to go back and rework your ideas and take into account your players’ ideas. There is nothing wrong with that; it happens to everyone. Maybe your current game group just doesn’t want to do retro-4-color settings at this point. They may change their minds later, or you may come up with an even better variant pitch. Just take your time and do it right.



ISSUES

Every single H&S adventure is different, but like comics, they should have some common elements. Most stories, interactive or not, should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. How one does this depends on the individual Ed. Some will make a bunch of notes and leave the heroes to follow their own path, others will structure a very detailed plan of what plot elements happen when and where. Neither is superior to the other and both can work quite well depending on the players and the Ed.

FRAMING

This is taking the current adventure, placing it in a specific order, and describing it in a specific way. Traditionally, the framing of a comic book is Introduction—Story—Complication—Resolution—Denouement/Final Page. The style used can impact this greatly.

PANELS

One method is to frame the story in the manner of a comic book, complete with

describing the Issue number, title, cover-art, and first-page introduction. Then, as the story progresses, describing scenes the heroes can't know or see—the villain making plans, the focus on a bomb under a presidential candidate's chair. Then on to the resolution element and last page—sometimes the resolution stalls in the story and leaves a cliffhanger last page that asks a question or poses a problem for the "Next Issue." This style of framing isn't for everyone; it does create a slightly greater distance between the player and the story. But at the same time, the Ed. can use it to reveal important information, convey a specific feel, and otherwise have a simple way to tell a story.

IMMERSION

This form of framing is by far more common, essentially running each H&S adventure only by the story elements the heroes know. The players know only what's been revealed to their heroes, and the way the story unfolds is hidden to them until they discover it. This method works well, but often relies on how the players themselves think and



how well the group as a whole plays. If they don't think to look for clues, it doesn't tend to happen. One player who isn't as immersed as others can break the frame for everyone else. This frame is used to convey a feel of the "world is real," and not just a game or a comic book you're taking part in. Its goal is to maintain the fourth wall at nearly any cost.

GAME

This is the traditional frame of an RPG, and not a terrible choice. It sometimes doesn't work as well for comic book-style heroes as it does for other genres and themes. This frame consists of the heroes being given a task, and they move to resolve it through their actions, dice rolls, fortune, and decisions made by the players individually. They know what the Ed. tells them, or what they themselves deduce. The characters are tools to achieve an end that is typically "beating" the villain, or "winning" the game rather than the telling of a story with both positive and negative events chosen by the players themselves.

INTRODUCING THE HEROES

Regardless what frame is used, all games have an introduction—something to convey information that the players need to know. Much of this is often covered in the Pitch, but it should be distilled and clarified. That being said, not all game introductions are at the beginning.

Begin at the beginning

Simply start at the origin of the characters—where the beginning of super-heroic life starts. The origin may be the pivotal event that triggers their Drive, or it may just be what imbues them or makes them aware of their powers. Then advance them either individually or as a group to form the "team."

In Media Res

"In the middle of things" is what that means. In this case, start the game somewhere, anywhere, right smack dab in the elements of the main plot—usually in the middle of a fight

scene/action sequence. Then slowly reveal what's going on by moving forward.

Flashback/Retroactive Events

Beginning at the end. What?! How? You proceed much like "In Media Res" above. You start the story introduction somewhere else, typically just before the villain floods the room with poison gas, or in the middle of describing his master plan. Then you flashback to the very beginning, and tell the story up to the point where the flashback occurs. This is a bit of a railroading aspect because nothing the heroes do will really change the point at which they have the flashback, but it may very well give them clues, abilities, or plans that they can use to move the story forward after that point.

ENDING THE SESSION

When a particular game session ends, a good rule is to hold a post-game bull pen session to discuss the things players liked and disliked.

LETTERS' PAGE

One particular way to handle a post-session wrap-up is to treat it like next Issue's letters' page. Comic books have a long tradition of printing readers' letters and responses by the comic's editors and creators.

The letters' page can be used to discuss the good and bad aspects of the game. It can also be used to ask "questions" as well as theorize as a fan about the future of the game. Most notably this is a good way to suggest plot ideas, adventure challenges, and social aspects of play that players wish to address in the long run. Eds. wishing to use letters' pages should respond with humor and some ambiguity about what will be happening next, because quite simply you want them to come back and enjoy the next issue.

Unfolding Pages

The middle of the story is often the most important part. It is, for comic writers, a difficult hump—you can't advance it too slowly or too quickly; you've got to pace it just right. Gaming is a little more forgiving. If one plot wraps up you can always start the seeds of another.

Pacing

Pacing for an RPG adventure is how you keep the dynamics and flow of the story moving forward. Some people use combat in order to keep pace. This may or may not work for your particular game group. Combat can live up a game, but relying on it solely for that purpose becomes tedious. Off-panel violence may be better for pacing. A victim, wounded and bleeding, staggers into the heroes' lair. They now have to act fast and make decisions—is this a foe? An ally? Do their drives have them intervene regardless of his status? These snap-second decisions help enliven the game and forge long-term hooks and lay ground for later repercussions.

Keeping the plot moving forward sometimes requires further intervention even for the best group of heroes. Sometimes it's an ally Drive in to give them information. Sometimes it's a sudden revelation of an element they've previously discovered.

In order to overcome "dead air" or empty panel problems, the Ed. needs to shift forward. It's all right to skip panels of background if they aren't directly relevant to the current problem, but by the same token those panels can sometimes help keep the game flowing until they hit their own stride. There are even times when you can skip ahead, moving the story forward, without showing panels that may be important, but which have the group stuck. Maybe you can flashback to it later, revealing secret plans, or have the heroes push that event into their background. It may move them forward but interferes with the game pacing and so is shifted off-panel for the flow of the game to continue.

PLOTTING

Plotting is far more involved than pacing. This is the meat and bones of the adventure; the "what they are doing" plots can and do vary from issue to issue, with a variety of sub-plots linked to the main story or the characters.

Some elements of plot that are important to consider are: Why are the heroes involved and why do they care?

These are both important elements of any plot that a Ed. creates. In H&S, part of this is

pre-determined by the characters' drives, but the exact way it fits the characters is up to the Ed. and the players. A hero group may not have the same drives, but their ties to each other should help get them entangled into the plot anyway.

What personal issues will be addressed?

Strangely enough, many comic books do dredge up hero's personal issues regularly—if they are afraid of something, then it will probably show up. If they question their heroism, then situations occur that add fuel to their self-doubt, as well as push them into doing heroic things. Not every "comic issue" does so, but many hit heroes where it hurts, sometimes several consecutive issues will do so for the express purpose of leading them to a resolution.

Sample Plot "Sparks"

- Every plot has a spark—an evocative element that piques the interest of the "reader" and provides something to resolve, address, or otherwise focus on. Here are a few examples:
- Ambition, Betrayal, Catastrophe, Chase, Discovery, Grief and Loss, Love and Hate, Persecution, Rebellion, Rivalry, Self-Sacrifice, and Survival.

AMBITION

Ambition rarely targets a hero directly. More often it is the ambition of others that triggers their involvement, whether the well-meaning beneficial ambition of an ally or the self-serving ambition of a villain. Ambition can drive the plot and be firmly tied to other plot elements. It is essentially a trait where desire or need for self-advancement often overrides other considerations. This ambition may be for wealth, power, love, or acceptance.

Examples:

An otherwise well-meaning person may be so driven by their ambition to get their project finished that they cut corners in building materials on a new high-rise, and the ambition triggers a catastrophe when

the building collapses. The heroes seeking the cause will eventually turn up the failure of this person in light of their ambition. Dealing with this may be more a matter of informing the appropriate authorities or making the person deal with the real repercussions of his actions—the deaths of others.

The ambition to be proven right of a foil who involves themselves regularly in a character's life may make him, in his capacity of an editor of a newspaper, pay a mercenary to challenge the hero. The impact of that challenge may create a new villain, or reveal the foil's own prejudices when it comes to the hero's activities.

Another hero, constantly compared to the player's own heroic character, becomes frustrated in their own desire for accolades for what they do. This drives them in a fit of hubris to challenge the hero to a battle. Whether he wins or loses, the impact will tend to be lasting. If he fails, he may change his Drive and return as a foe or perhaps as a broken, hurt foil, desperate to be seen in a positive light still. If he wins, he might realize how powerful he is, and how easy it is to use that power to benefit his own desires.

Ask and answer these questions:

- What is the price of ambition?
- How does ambition affect the character and those around him?
- How far will ambition go?

Betrayal

Of the plot sparks listed here, this one is perhaps the most powerful in terms of its impact and how well it can tie to all other possible plots. Ambition may lead to betrayal, for example, and betrayal may be born from grief and loss.

The first things to ask in using this plot spark are: "Who is involved? Who betrays whom?" It may be an individual, a group, or an ideal that is betrayed, just as those elements might betray the person involved.

Examples

The hero's significant other—wife/husband, girlfriend/boyfriend, or alien lover—betrays him to his enemies because of a lack of understanding about the importance of secret identities.

A new hero on the team betrays his team members by tricking them into performing actions that on the surface look heroic, but in reality are a set-up for a complex plot to make the heroes look like criminals. The betrayer's reasons could be anything from a significant amount of money to pure revenge.

The hero, faced with a difficult personal challenge, fails. Rather than living up to her own ideals, she takes the easy route and accepts the failure—she betrays herself and the elements of her Drive.

Betrayal as a plot spark may be deeply personal or completely and utterly sterile and distant from the heroes. Depending on how it's handled, a betrayal may lead to deeper events more personally impacting or worldview-shaking.

In betrayal-style plots, the following questions should be asked:

- Who or what is betrayed?
- Who is betraying them?
- What is the impact of that betrayal?

CATASTROPHES

Excitement without combat! This plot is a very useful one for heroes, in fact, it targets most drives equally except Spirit of Adventure—and even they might be affected.

Catastrophes take many forms, not just personal disasters to a character or the team, but terrible things happening to towns, cities, nations, or the world. Earthquakes, tidal waves, floods, tornadoes/hurricanes, fires, and meteor strikes—these catastrophes will need heroes to divert or deter the disaster, or save lives or rebuild in the aftermath. It may be a single event or series of events that together add up to significant destruction. Naturally caused catastrophes are useful in that there is no person behind them, so they are not likely

to directly lead to combat, but may involve heroes using their powers and skills in fairly tense situations.

Examples:

A terrible storm assaults the heroes' home area. Flooding, wind damage and the like lead to an area blackout. Many people are trapped without food, power, or heat, and some may be hurt and need to reach help or safety.

A meteor hurtles towards earth. If it hits, it will annihilate the eastern seaboard of the Americas and devastate most coastal cities on either side of the Atlantic. Can the heroes borrow, beg, or steal a spacecraft to get them to it, and find a way to deflect it from its course?

An apartment building is aflame. Due to its ancient design, many people are trapped on the upper floors where firefighters can't reach them. The heroes must hurry and help rescue them before smoke and fire or the slowly collapsing structure kills them.

When using a catastrophe, the questions asked and answered are:

- What is damaged?
- How serious is it?
- What caused it?
- Who is it threatening?
- Is someone behind it?