Hi playtesters!

Seriously, this is one sketchy document. It’s rough, lean, and limited to the parts that we need to see in action, more of an annotation or change-this accompaniment than a text of its own. And it’s written in my ordinary voice so you’re going to get way more of that than a game text ought to have. We know this.

The good news is, we want to know what happens in play. You’re getting in on the most relevant, most significant development process. We think we know what we’re doing, but thinking isn’t doing. **Play** is the doing. Grab those PDFs (*Champions* 3rd edition, *Champions II, Champions III*), see how this thing you’re reading kicks their tires, and try it out.

Come visit Adept Play, at [http://adeptplay.com](http://adeptplay.com). That’s my site, and you can post all you want to say what happened in your game and what rules you used to do it. If you’re bold, record a session, either voice or video. Enthuse about characters and moments, or ask questions about whatever you want. Take a look at the designer chat videos and the recordings of our games in action. The Hero Games folks will be there too.

Right now, we don’t need any text editing or suggestions, because the actual text is in development based on what we find out from play. If any bits of this turn out to be good explanations, then we’ll keep’em.

The same goes for rules suggestions, but if you really want to talk about that, and if you’ve pledged at the Kickstarter, get in touch via the Contact form at Adept Play and you can be in a video dialogue if you want.
Setting and concept

There is no setting for this game. That’s because the comics that inspired it didn’t have one either; they were set sort of “right now right here,” without much reflection or justification. Look around – and imagine some superheroes there too. And that’s all.

There are lots of ways to start, but for playtesting purposes, try it like this. Whoever’s organizing this group for play, have these two things at the ready, no more and no less.

- **One** solid bit of content about superpowers, heroes, or villains
- **One** solid bit of fictional style and specific types of problems
  - In this one, include the location of play, ideally somewhere that someone in the group knows really well.

There’s no way to provide an official “column A, column B” menu for these. They must be generated from your own interest, and although it sounds weird, it’s best not to discuss or negotiate them. If you’re organizing the game, make up what you want and tell everybody else.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples for the first – but make your own! These are examples I happen to like, that’s all</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Heroes/villains – who can tell the difference?</td>
<td>• Powers are a distrusted minority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Techno-wondrous discovery</td>
<td>• Superheroics are bright, fun, and hopeful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sooner or later, your powers will kill you</td>
<td>• Powers require effort, determination, and practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples for the second, based on recent play and suggestions – note: no mention of powers</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Coming-of-age in coastal California</td>
<td>• Black ops and espionage in southern Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Family: love and lies; in Gainesville, Florida</td>
<td>• Punk rebellion in 70s/80s Brisbane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Procedural crime-and-law drama in Chicago</td>
<td>• Young adult working life in San Antonio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From there, what your group will play is your superhero comic title. It doesn’t have to be consistent with or to imitate any other. The rules won’t tell you what a “hero” is. There is no genre pack to conform to. As far as the bunch of you are concerned, this is the superhero comic you most want to be into right now, and that is all it needs to be.

That will require communication and trust among you, but contrary to the boilerplate gaming advice, that doesn’t mean tedious negotiations that lock everyone into a complex agreement. Chat it up, but only a little. Going with those two points above, it’s better to find out what everyone makes of them via their characters rather than to run every step of character creation by committee.

Attendance pays off big for this game, so if that means fewer people, that’s OK. Just two or three players will work fine. It also responds well to expanding the group size later, after a foundation is laid by a few motivated participants.

**Here’s an example of those two starting points.**

- **Super “villains” sometimes aren’t, and “heroes” rarely are**
- **Crime, police, and law drama; set in Chicago**
I’ve seen two other things work well for initial group orientation. One is to provide one or two example comics pages with a distinctive art style, and say, “it looks like this.” Another is to establish a super-naming convention that all such characters use. If you use these, present them as fixed, non-negotiated features of the game you are organizing.

What about powers specification? It’s almost irresistible to specify something like super-tech across the cosmos, or martial arts + mental powers, or animal shapeshifters … and you can do that if you want. But it’s better to start with the two statements described above, let the players independently come up with concepts, and then treat that as the specification. For a number of complicated reasons, pre-specifying powers is best suited for very short, typically single-session play.

It may seem picky or trivial, but crucially, the second statement shouldn’t have anything in it about powers or any superhero/villain material. It’s really tempting, but resist. The best, and very reliable character creation is sparked by the individual, internal perceptions between the two statements, per person. And then when people see what one another is doing with it, that leads to an emergent "our title" effect that inspires play.

Don’t get distracted by debating what superheroes would or should do. Whatever ethical or legal profile you want your character to have, that’s what they’ll have; whatever activities they get up to, that’s what they’ll do.

What that means is, you can’t hide behind the game or a genre regarding the character’s morality or likeability. You own that, with whatever it entails for people wanting or not wanting to play with you. The best practice is to find people whose interests and creative impulses overlap with yours.

If you just can’t help yourself at setting-building, it’s waiting for you. Nothing ever benefited more from “less is more” than the setup for this game, but “more is definitely more” is waiting around the corner. Instead of your voluminous epic notes, start with the characters, who are arriving chock-full of villains, implied history, implied or explicit setting concepts, and supporting cast. All these become yours to define, enrich, and develop. Work outwards from there and you’ll find a richer and more storied setting than you dreamed possible.
Characters begin

This is point-buy. But the best way to start is to know what you **don’t** spend points on.

1. You don’t spend points on anything about your character’s personal, social, or economic identity. Whatever you want, say so, and it’s free. That includes any and all wealth and skills that pertain to work and play.

2. You don’t spend points on anything that defines your character’s powers. The points will determine the powers’ scale and scope of effect, but not what they are.

There is no list or table or point structure about how wealthy your character is, or where they’re from, or what job they may have, or what they want from life. The best practice is to come up with a fictional someone you understand in social, economic, ethnic terms, and whom you genuinely like. Depth and complication aren’t helpful — warmth and sympathy definitely are.

Similarly, there’s nothing about “fire powers” or “space-warp powers” or “cybertech powers.” These rules are blatantly naked and the only tailor is you. Best practice? Go basic: pick something you enjoy seeing when it’s drawn on a comics page, and call it something obvious.

You start with some base values for free, and you get 100 more points for free. You then get as many points as you “buy” with Disadvantages, which start best at 100-140 points. So we talk about a “240 point character,” for example. You’ll spend all of them; don’t bank any unspent points for a starting character.

Think of it as filling in your sketchy start-up character concept from three directions: the person, the problems, and the characteristics/powers/skills. Do all three at once, rather than one at a time — you’ll find that each one informs both of the others.

The **person** has an ethnic, national, and economic background, and some current or working identity in those terms. He or she may display some subculture, important personal quality, or lifestyle too. Say so, very briefly, but recognize that these are key words or phrases that capture whole shelves of skills and knowledges and acquaintances and resources. Best practice: be honest and interested. This isn’t to please an audience but to please yourself.

- Most of this “corner” is intangible in terms of points, but it’s all as concrete in play as anything with points.
- Ordinary standards of attractiveness fall into this category as well, as they are usually an amalgam of literal appearance and social variables.

The **problems** stem most obviously from the Disadvantages. However, those are totally misnamed, as they provide the bulk of your character’s identity, standing, priorities, and situations. So you **want** them, rather than avoid or dodge around them. It’s the character who wails piteously about them, not you.

They fall into distinctive types.

- Social role: Secret Identity, Public Identity, and Unusual Looks
• Powers problems: Vulnerability, Dependency, Susceptibility, Activation, Burnout
• Disabilities: Physical Limitation, some Psychological Limitations, Berserk, Enrage
• Views and morals: most Psychological Limitations
  o Best practice: pick these which you like and want to see in play; the points refer to its emotional stability, not the precise view that’s held, so it doesn’t have to be dumb or strange
• Relationships: Hunted, Dependent Non-Player Character
• Its own thing: Unlucky

The combined costs of Disadvantages of the same type cannot exceed 50.

Now, 140 points is a lot, and typically you’ll have to scramble a little to get all the way. It’s almost axiomatic to look at about 100 points and be convinced that any more Disadvantages will ruin your hero, but then, adding a new angle with a few more of them, or beefing up a couple you have already, you provide the clincher that makes the character active and full of life.

Don’t leave any Disadvantage naked of content. Even if you’re hazy on the details, give each Hunted and DNPC a name.

For characteristics, powers, and skills, you can go look at the lists and point-costs at the end of this document, but stick with me for two last bits. First, likeability. This should be a person you can believe in, a power-set you like looking at, a problems profile you can sympathize with. Second, stay super basic – no fancy justifications, no attempt to get ahead of the point-costs, no special push for originality, no piling on multiple different skill or power-sets.

You may be tempted to write up a complicated text piece about the character’s origin. However, origin stories are not about how I got my powers, but about why our story starts here, referring to the immediate situation when the character is introduced.

Here’s what I mean by the three corners, for my character, starting with the first two statements and referring to them when I feel stalled. To repeat them,

• Super “villains” sometimes aren’t, and “heroes” rarely are
• Crime, police, and law drama; set in Chicago

For the “person,” I am a sucker for reformed villain characters, especially those who really were first introduced as villains in the comics. I got to thinking about someone who threw away the whole middle-class lifestyle – in fact, a white mom from the North Shore, to become a supervillain. But that went sour due to psycho or otherwise un-admirable features of her allies, and now she’s been asked to join the city’s super-team. She’s making a go of it, although she doesn’t have much faith in its overt ideals.

OK, that’s a lot in that corner, already more than I usually do, so I shelve all sorts of things I could keep making up about it.

But it does set up my shift to the “problems” corner, especially Disadvantages, which are going to involve a lousy reputation as people are reasonably unwilling to trust her, some borked relationships, and maybe some intense viewpoints. I’m getting an image of a pretty but rather hard-edged woman in her late twenties, holding a unique perspective from her shifts across privilege to outlaw.
It also informs my thoughts on her powers and skills, shifting to a slightly sinister, billowing sort of scary vaporous psycho-drug concept. (This is when I come up with the name, Miasma) (which instantly kicks me back to “person” because alliteration seizes me by the throat until I surrender and name her Miranda Mason) I also start thinking of her in combat, being mysterious, ambush-y, and weird.

I’m getting a further image of a genuinely reformed former villain, but not idealistic, instead being a gut-puncher and speaker of unwanted truths. As I take this to the quantitative side of character creation, the whole point is to keep working in from the corners, shifting from one to the other at any time.

Deep Dive

What’s wrong with starting higher than 250? Two reasons. First, the way experience points work is very nicely tuned to the 200-250 point range, so that after 50 experience points, your resulting 300 point character is way more interesting and effective than a starting 300 point character would be. Second, you can’t make an understandable profile of disadvantages when you have to fill that many points; it turns into a mess that doesn’t fuel situations.

The Identity Disadvantages are a big deal, as taking neither, taking one or the other, or taking both are all possible and all full of potential life-consequences.

Beware the following genre expectations for superhero role-playing. 1. The deliberately blank space, whether it’s amnesia or “just created yesterday” or too alien and alienated to know what anything is. 2. The well-rounded nothing, neatly constructed in four quadrants of offense, defense, movement, and “other.” 3. The fearful-fortress, built to sustain or obviate any imaginable way to get damaged; instead, just get ready for your character to be stunned, exhausted, knocked out, and hurt, and you might as well not waste points trying to say otherwise.

What about weird heroes? Aliens, androids, visiting demon nieces ... all those are fine, but for purposes of playtesting please stick with this “person with powers” model. Exotic characters work best as exaggerations of familiar problems rather than alternatives to them, so it’s good to see how you and the game do with the ordinary stuff first.

Nuts and bolts

Now it’s time for all those lists in the back, with their technical rules and their costs in points.

The basic Characteristics are Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Body, Intelligence, Ego, and Presence. These provide the basis for most skills use, attack and defense values of all kinds, actions based on raw ability, and some specialized applications like Presence Attacks.

You build them up from base 10 with points, at varying costs, like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Base value</th>
<th>Point cost</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strength 25 costs 15 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dexterity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dexterity 20 costs 30 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Constitution 18 costs 16 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Body 13 costs 6 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Intelligence 20 costs 10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ego 14 costs 8 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Presence 10 1 Presence 24 costs 14 points

- Long experiences teaches these functional minima and starting maxima:
  - Dexterity 18 to 27
  - Constitution 20 to 30
- But for everything else, go one way or the other: down there at 10 or a bit higher for characterization, or way up there, blowing 40 or so points for signature super identity.

The derived Characteristics are Defense, Speed, Recovery, Endurance, and Stun.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Base value</th>
<th>Point cost</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>Con /5</td>
<td>2 for additional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5 for Speed 4 15 for Speed 5 25 for Speed 6 35 for Speed 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovery</td>
<td>(Str + Con) /5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endurance</td>
<td>Con x 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stun</td>
<td>([(Str + Con) /2] + Body</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Recovery, Stun, and Endurance may not be increased with points. Decisions about the others are a bit complex.

- There are two ways to go with Defense, whether totally one way or combined.
  - Bulk it up with points and consider the Hardened Advantage as well.
  - Consider various powers that increase it, like Force Field or Force Wall, which are already Hardened.
  - Eventually, with powers included, you should be looking at defense totals of 18-25.
- Speed, meaning number of actions, not distance-per-time, must be given however many points it takes to bring it up to the next integer, and then 10 points for each further full point that you may want. You can’t buy decimals to end up at a non-integer.
  - Speed 3 is a notably slow character, 4 is slow but functional, 5 is generally quick and flexible, and 6 is breakneck fast.
  - Don’t be greedy for speedy. It’s very easy to overrun your own Endurance.

You’ll find yourself rounding. The rule is almost standard arithmetic: round up or down based on 0.5, but if it’s 0.5 exactly, go up or down based on what benefits the character.

A lot of things in the game are built on 5’s. So building the relevant characteristic to 3, e.g. 23, gets you the same dice or other 5-based effect as if it had been built to 5.

- Defense and Recovery are derived this way.
- Strength damage and most of the powers, e.g. Energy Blast work this way.
- The characteristic rolls and several of the skills do too, as their target values are built from $[9 + (\text{the base characteristic divided by 5})]$.

Other important derived features are built on 3’s, especially the two Combat Values for both physical and mental fighting. And a few are built on 2’s, i.e., halving, like Stun.
The Skills are the hardest to wrap your head around, because only these few cost points. They are best conceived as powers, i.e., super-skills, over-the-top in their effects. Everything else, all the professional skills, social and hobby skills, income, acquaintances, property, whatever, is free.

Most skills work according to the formula \[9 + \left(\frac{\text{base characteristic}}{5}\right)\]: Acrobatics, Climbing, Computer Programming, Detective Work, Disguise, Security Systems, and Stealth.

The oddballs are Find Weakness, Luck, and Martial Arts, for which see the descriptions.

I also direct your attention to Skill Levels, i.e., bonuses for specific things. These are gold for filling in little handfuls of points you may have left over, as even a single +1 is extremely effective and goes far for characterization and described effects.

The best practice for skills is to stay small: pick one, or at most two. You can improve them and add more through the course of play.

Now for Powers. The shocking thing? This is the easy part. Choose any damn thing you want for what your powers are and what they do. You’ll be limited in effect, but not in conceptual scope.

Most of the powers work like this: for 5 points, you get either 1d6, a fixed unit of 5, or an equivalent unit of some kind.

- Energy Blast, Force Field, Flight, Telepathy, Mind Control, Mental Illusions, Mind Scan, Growth, Shrinking, Tunneling, Telekinesis, Stretching, Lack of Weakness
- (both Strength and Presence follow this logic as well)

Some of them are similar but cost more per unit.

- Power Drain, Flash, Regeneration, Density Increase, Darkness, Shrinking, and Entangle, at a unit for 10 points
- Power Transfer and Killing Attacks, at a unit for 15 points

And some are quirky enough to need their own conversion of points to effect.

- Most of the defenses: Armor, Force Wall, Damage Resistance, Life Support, Ego Defense, Flash Defense
- Some of the Enhanced Senses
- Superleap, Swimming, Faster-Than-Light Travel

Some of them work like Skills: e.g. Danger Sense, most of the Enhanced Senses, and Missile Deflection

The other thing to look at for any given power is how to read the dice you roll. Most of them can be read two ways: adding up the total, or counting “Body,” which is 1 per die rolled unless it shows a 1 (for 0 Body) or a 6 (for 2 Body).

- Some of them require doing both, especially Energy Blast and Strength (i.e., damage when punching someone)
- Others are one or the other, like Mind Control or Presence (for Presence Attacks), which only sum the total; or Entangle, which only counts the Body.
- A few are weird in some way, like Killing Attacks
Pay attention to whether a power needs Endurance to fuel it in use. If so, it will be 1 point of Endurance for every 5 points of the cost, e.g., zapping a 50 point Energy Blast which does 10d6 damage will burn 10 points of your Endurance. You can use a power at less than full strength, spending only the Endurance for the stated amount.

You can combine powers that cost Endurance into single actions, for example 6d6 Energy Blast + 2d6 Flash for a total of 50 points. They’re irrevocably joined by doing this and will always go off together, and if you use them, or rather it, at lower power, each will be reduced in effect and Endurance proportionately. This makes obvious sense for multi-effect attacks, but plenty of others work too, as you can see with Miasma.

Defenses need a little consideration. All characters have a Defense score, but it can be modified or added upon in different ways.

- Buying up the Defense score itself
  - This costs no Endurance to use
  - It can be conceived either as part of the basic defense feature or as some added effect
  - Hardening some or all of it (protects against Armor-Piercing)
- Getting the power Force Field, which has Defense points of its own
  - This is already Hardened
  - It costs Endurance and can turn on and off
- In either case, the effect can be conceived as the features of some other power, e.g., attacks swishing through one’s desolidified form, or whatever
- The power Force Wall is different from either, as it interposes a barrier where you desire and isn’t part of your body or attached to it.

Many characters will benefit from placing powers into a Power Framework, called an Elemental Control. This is a bit math-y but very kind to powers which share a single special effect. Think of them wielding or using one thing which happens to have lots of applications, all the time.

Set it up like this:

1. List all the powers you want in the Elemental Control. They all must require Endurance; anything else can share the special effect but can’t be in the framework.
2. Find the one with the smallest cost. Take ½ that cost, and that’s the cost of the Elemental Control as a thing of its own.
3. Reduce the cost of each power in the framework by that amount.

Best practice: the special effect that defines the Elemental Control should be a single, recognizable “thing.” It doesn’t have to be particularly realistic, but it should not be a completely fictional substance or status or type of powers. The point of this framework is to get festive with minor, unscheduled mechanical modifications of everything in it, and to do that, you need something solid to use for the reference point.

You don’t have to use an Elemental Control, but if you do have two or more Endurance-based powers that share a special effect, it’s kind of silly not to.

*Getting numerical with Miasma*
Strength 15, Dexterity 23, Constitution 25, Body 10, Intelligence 10, Ego 15, Presence 15
Cost = 5 + 39 + 30 + 10 + 5 = 89

Defense 5, Speed 5, Recovery 8, Endurance 50, Stun 30
Cost = 15, for a total characteristics cost of 104

I “shaved” Dexterity to save 3 points, keeping a Combat Value of 8 due to rounding. But I didn’t do the same with Constitution, because I wanted Endurance and Stun to be nice and high. Also notice that I didn’t increase her Defense, so look for some dedicated defense to show up in the powers.

Skills: Stealth (target value 14) and Find Weakness (target value 11)
Cost = 15

Enhanced Senses: vision, broad spectrum, 360 degrees, 20
Ego Defense 6
Knockback Resistance -4” 10

Elemental Control for narcotic mists 20
  • Vaporous Gas Jet: Energy Blast 8d6 20
  • Scary Cloud: Concealment 2” radius + Mental Illusions 4d6 20
  • Nightmare Walker: Desolidification + Defense 10 Force Field, 20

(see how that works? Each of those three powers, or combined powers, would have cost 40 points, but I subtracted 20 from each (noting for later, each entry costs 8 Endurance to use at full power)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Discount</th>
<th>Final Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elemental Control discount</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaporous Gas Jet 8d6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scary Cloud 2” radius + 4d6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightmare Walker Desolid + Force Field 10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total = 80

= 131 and that makes 235.

You never nail the points on the nose. At my first pass, with her Ego Defense at 5, but I ended up with 234 points, one point short of a multiple of 5, so I bumped Ego Defense up. Good candidates for such minor editing include any specialized defense (Flash Defense, Ego Defense) and the characteristics Intelligence or Presence. The latter two are useful this way because attacks against them are rated in multiples, so even one point can be significant.

I’m thinking of her as this terrifying cloud of dream-type darkness, with hallucinatory images fading in and out; she can see through it fine and zaps you from within it, and you’re never quite sure if she’s where you think.

Here’s a concept: instead of building everything in parallel to maximize specific effects, I tossed in a couple of contradictions, for example, she has Ego Defense, but she’s also vulnerable to Mental Illusions. The net effect produces some complexity which can be developed throughout play.

Now it’s time to list those Disadvantages, most of which were in place well before I’d locked down the powers and characteristics.
Psychological Limitations
- Law-abiding: common, irrational (20)
- Cynical: common (15)

Enrage when attacked on the basis of her past 11- recover 14- (10)

Hunted
- By former supervillain partners the Wild Side (small group, super-powered, manipulative) (20)
- By ex-husband Donald and his support group (organization, ordinary resources, ruinous) (20)

Vulnerable 2x Mental Illusions (15)
Unusual Looks (ex-supervillain reputation) (15)

Dependent Non-Player-Characters
- Normal + constantly, the former Polar Star 14- (20)

Total points in Disadvantages = 135

You don’t have to explain and justify everything, but the reasoning behind the precise disadvantages should be strong for you and your anticipated enjoyment of playing the character. For example, she’s vulnerable to mind effects of the same sorts she wields, which is just begging for some kind of emergent special effect problem in the right situation. Her law-abiding Limitation is not some goody-two-shoes ideal, but instead the direct result from her leaving the Wild Side and agreeing to become part of the hero team. It’s quite sincere given its value, but (1) she’s bad at it, so it’s got an irrational side; and (2) she’s liable to be touchy about anyone questioning that, making this disadvantage and the Enrage mutually reinforce one another.

I hope it’s clear that neither the “positive” nor the “negative” points come first. The character makes most sense when you list characteristics, skills, and powers down one side, and the disadvantages down the other, side by side. All sorts of things should match or be intriguing throughout the resulting comparison.

Deep Dive

Originality is over-rated. Copy like hell, rip off anything and everything – shoot, nab your favorite mask design and color it some other color. Most of the most famous superheroes are rip-off salads. No concept or power-set ever made a character good. What did that is what someone did with it, their way, all the way. That’s your job here.

Toss out all thought of superhero types. Not only does the group not need “one of these, one of these, and two of those,” but you don’t need to be any kind of “these.” Stay with the first two notions and whatever seemed good from there, categories be damned.

The rules-distinction between powers and skills is arbitrary, since the “skills” are all non-realistic anyway. You can use that principle in the opposite direction, assigning special effects to powers as “more-of-this skill.” If your character is supposed to be absurdly stealthy, then instead of buying Stealth skill unto infinity, get the power Invisibility and define its special effects as the Skill, i.e., being “really super crazy stealthy this time,” using the rules for Invisibility exactly as written. Mysterious characters love Teleport, for those sudden disappearances.

This is how nominally non-powered characters turn out to be effective enough to hold their own in a super-powered conflict, using nothing more than the ordinary attention to the special effects, which
in this case hype up how “trained” or “talented” the character is. To back it up, get a whole bag of Skill Levels at different point values, and shift them strategically.

Yeah, the math is full of loopholes due to the rounding. You get the same result for many useful values by shaving points from the base characteristics. Go ahead and do it ... but mind the occasional costs in play, when you really need those points of Endurance or when an opponent with the same CV has Dexterity 24 and you’re at 23 because it saved you 3 points, so he or she goes first.
Characters change

Lots of things may change for a character based on the events of play with no points involved: legal status, wealth, location, relationships, most skills, and more. Such things often tie into the point-based items, but they may not and don’t have to. However, they are far from intangible – the character’s lifestyle, social status, and emotion-based relationships set the entire context for what the points may do.

Be thinking about it, because those experience points roll in steadily, awarded by the GM every session. If things seemed only mildly adverse, or play was short by your standards, award 2 to each player. If it was a solid session with some fightin’ worth talking about, then award 4. Give everyone the same amount. Never mind who role-played most or anything else individually distinctive.

An experience point is another character point, 1:1, and it will surprise you how fast they add up. Playing this game is change, which is why it doesn’t correspond to franchise superheroes at all. They don’t change, they can’t change, because they’re slaves to the brand. But you are not.

• The easiest: just plain getting better, whether stronger, faster, more skilled, or whatever, including adding new things.
• Refining and rearranging: altering the composition of related powers.
• Powers/concept transformation: when you’ve banked up on points and feel as if your character could undergo a nearly-complete rewrite including a drastic jump-up in power.

Theoretically, you can also spend points to reduce or get rid of Disadvantages, again 1:1. In practice, however, this rarely makes sense, because Disadvantages are not actually bad. The character would not be himself or herself without most of them. And all of them should be in place to make play more fun and more easy for everyone, not to make the character annoying to play or to play with.

Changing Disadvantages makes more sense in terms of rearrangement, based on what’s happened in play. Perhaps that reconciliation with the Hunted is convincing, satisifying, and final – in which case, cross the name right out of the Disadvantages list. Or perhaps after a meltdown or two, it seems right to reduce the intensity of a Psychological Limitation.

This might apply in the negative as well, if a number of sessions have shown that this particular Hunted or that Psychological Limitation (or anything, these are just examples) aren’t as much fun to play as we’d hoped, or aren’t making sense enough to have been played at all.

You do, of course, have to find something to do with the points that have been freed up. Look for a foe who’d be happy to become a new Hunted based on that memorable fight a while ago, or for a viewpoint that seems a little over-intense based on how the character’s been played. You can use the same logic that applies to powers sometimes, too, that instead of acquiring this new feature on the sheet, the character always had it and now it’s just becoming more relevant to whatever is happening next.
You don’t have to replace the old Disadvantage with one of the same kind. This is a fine chance to rearrange the whole list a little, upping this thing over here or reducing that one over there. The only thing that has to stay the same is the total.

None of that costs any points. But I suppose if a player wants to have a lower point total for Disadvantages and is willing to spend Experience Points to get it, he or she can. I’ve never seen it happen in play.

You can never tell just what you’re going to add to or change about a character; play will determine that. But nothing stops me from musing over possible additions, and here are my thoughts for Miasma:

- Get a little more fear/Ego involved, with higher Presence and related Ego attacks
- Add this power, Is She Really Here: Teleportation + Flash 1d6 20

Deep Dive

Improving and changing things on the character sheet doesn’t have to correspond exactly to in-fiction changes. Instead, it’s often useful and satisfying to think of such “addition” as revealing more about the character as he or she is, as if the effect in question had always been there, but happens not to have been explicitly used in the fiction until now.

Mystery Powers are possible, when you bank up points in an unnamed slot and let the GM define it. In play, he or she can trigger it, focusing on special effects without being too clear about the exact rules being used, and you can try it, without really knowing what it is in rules terms. This can go on – as it grows in points – until such a time as the GM and you choose to bring it fully into the light.

Both tangible and intangible aspects of the character sometimes come together to provide a solid “end” for a character as an engine of play. Events and outcomes of relevant conflicts, the strength of powers and effectiveness in general, attitudes and ethics, and more, may add up to the character becoming so resolved and solid-feeling that he or she may do better as a background for future play. The effect is kind of a happy ending, as the character is now more like a franchise standby, rather than an intriguing, attention-grabbing question mark, and he or she can serve as a reliable source of characterization, resources, and general sense of pride in the history of play.

Situations of play
Whose story is this, and what is “the story” anyway? Comics are famous for their powerful storytelling, whether in one-off single issues or incredible epics. Who makes that happen in role-playing?

Champions Now play doesn’t follow plots, it makes them. It may seem impossible, but if the group uses the following tools, and cares about what they’re doing, then together you will create one-off gems and build complicated sagas that stand up with anything in the comics.

Let’s say you’re the Game Master. You have: the two statements, the location, and from the characters, a newly-derived understanding of “what powers are like,” some guaranteed adversaries from the Hunteds, and a fairly extensive supporting cast from the DNPCs and especially from the lifestyles and social identities.

This is your setting. It’s the physical and social ecology of play, and it’s very rich already. What it needs now is a little bit more of you.
Look at those two statements again, and the location – think about what sort of super-characters you would think have made or could make a big impact there, in that context. Keep the powers-concept in line with what you’re looking at from the character sheets. Think of how any super-powered Hunteds or other implied characters might already be doing things, or might be about to do things, and what they want.

Best practice for that: less is more. You can always fill in more back-story to the setting and super-history later, but if you data-dump three textbooks worth of it on the game right away, you’ll diminish the focus on the current characters and overwhelm your own preparation with too much planning.

Non-super characters are just as important, and here the best practice is the opposite: more is more. Look at the various DNPCs and — important — like them and get ready to play them as people with good brains and understandable commitments. See if any of them make sense as non-quantified supporting cast across more than one character. Also, invent as many NPCs as you can based on the player-characters’ lifestyles, relationships, work, and families. For example, a character may have a romantic partner who is not a DNPC – just ask.

It’s good to have a big source of names handy. I don’t know why, but picking names almost at random for NPCs curiously results in the names being utterly perfect for those characters in retrospect.

Now for the group itself and the situations they’ll be in. Someone is sure to have asked already, so wait, how are we all together? The best answer is whatever seems easiest, based on the original statements and on all those character sheets have contributed to it. Executive action is fine – you, the GM should, just … you know, pick any of these or anything like it.

- We are a team or squad trusted by and at least partly established by an institution.
- We are a team or squad, forced into it against our will.
- We share a common ideal or organization, and value our group as a united front.
- We share personal history with a common injustice and have united in self-protection.
- We’re not a team or squad, but like-minded people who work well together, usually on one another’s individual concerns.
Whatever the answer is, never mind planning and executing tedious machinations to make this happen. Start either well after it’s established and no one cares any more, or right when it’s settled and the characters are all ready to try it out.

That’s another source of supporting cast right there as well. See if any existing DNPCs make sense in those roles, just as before, and invent anyone new into this group-organization concept that makes sense to you.

DNPCs may strike you as too fragile to be important, but don’t forget that most of a character concept isn’t represented by points. The most powerful executive officer of the nation where the heroes live may be “incompetent” in points terms, but that doesn’t make him or her less able to affect the characters’ lives, or necessarily bad at that job.

- Far from it, as it happens. That would be -20 points in Characteristics, right? Big deal. Drop Body to 8 (-2), Constitution to 6 (-8), and Speed to 1 (-10).
- Disadvantages are our friend, and 50 points of Disadvantages is a good limit for NPCs.
  - Clearly this character has strong views, so that’s a couple of Common-Provocation but not irrational Psychological Limitations for 15 points each.
  - As a head of state, a bit of Hunted by an internal conspiracy is just right, a manipulative special-interest group with interesting resources, for 20 points.
- The net effect is 30 points to spend. I consider it bad form to recoup those characteristics we decreased. So let’s bring his or her Presence to 24 for 7 points, get 1d6 Luck for 5, and pump the other 18 points into Skill Levels for Intelligence rolls, putting him or her at a target number of 17 or less.
- Let’s say you consider him or her to be good at that job too, with the necessary skills, contacts, resources, and social savvy. Not looking especially “incompetent” after all, I think.

As implied in that example, there is no reason ever to make an NPC ditzy, clueless, emotionally helpless, abrasive, or bereft of common sense. A quirk leaning in one of those directions is fun. Genuinely dysfunctional isn’t.

How about play itself? We all know that somehow it will involve heroes and villains hitting one another, and very likely, also include emotional meltdowns and reconciliations, but how is this done in any enjoyable, playable way? What, specifically, does the Game Master do now that all the players are sitting there, each probably over-invested in his or her character, looking expectant?

This may sound tame, but play the characters’ lifestyles. “You wake up – what sort of place do you live in? What’s it like? Who do you see first, or have to talk to?” Decide how one or more of the Dependent NPCs are involved with the answers, and play them into the situations. Play everybody the character would come into contact with through this particular morning or whenever, showcasing their personalities, priorities, and expectations, and see what the character does and says.

Through this, each character’s relationships, social identity, and relevant institutions are brought into play. They become active agents of their own and they provide usable, familiar locations to be revisited. Since this isn’t “Days of Our Lives,” or at least not entirely, the GM can now take it further into developing what we’ve all been waiting for, conflicts.

You’ve got them in a place, talking to each other and other characters, dealing with one or more situations – no matter how non-violent or even pleasant a situation might be, it’s time to roll dice!
That’s right, not in combat. We’re talking about jobs, bosses, family, romantic partners, friends, and whoever they may meet. The world isn’t just big, it’s rich in details and full of all the little implications of those two statements made at the beginning. Use the location. Provide characters’ opinions. Apply pressure from the tensions in all these things. Find yourself in conflicts some time.

When it comes to understanding situations and noticing things, the rolls in question are typically Intelligence or Perception, both based on the following equation:

- \( 9 + (\text{Intelligence over 5}) \)
- Roll 3d6 – hitting the target number or below is success

Neither of which, however, are worth anything unless there’s something worth realizing or noticing. There’s no roll to perceive that Bob the New Guy is angling for the hero’s job as it’s hardly a secret, but can he spot that Bob has a key-card that only top executives should be using? When the hero’s romantic partner assures her that “Dad is gonna love meeting you,” is he lying? The pressure comes from the consequences of failure – use those failures for very precise actions and consequences to be played as soon as possible, which can be seen as such in retrospect.

The other, often more important roll is how you influence someone, using Presence. This roll is different, composed of 1d6 per 5 points of Presence. If you can equal or exceed your target’s Presence, he or she will take what you want seriously or with some sympathy; if you can equal or exceed three times that amount, you can get your way pretty much how you want it.

In a lot of ways, interactions in the player-characters’ ordinary lives are combats of their own. You’ll see in the comics that a conversation is often illustrated using the same techniques as a fight, and there’s a reason for that – even when all the interactions are empathetic and positive. You can do the same in play.

Play comes alive when these rolls have consequences, success or failure. If the character fails to notice something, that something should matter very soon. If he or she succeeds in a Presence roll, that interaction will turn out very differently from how it would if the roll failed.

Now something more has to happen, namely an absurdly large injection of adversity and adversaries. It’s a combination now, of the players playing the characters doing things, and of the GM’s same proactiveness regarding all the other characters. Causing trouble is the GM’s job: working from what’s known and what’s happened, thinking about whatever individuals and organizations might be active regarding the location, and especially about those villains I was just talking about.

The first place to look is on the character sheets, because the Hunteds may have been named by the players, but you, the GM, get to make them up. You may have some more organizations and super-powered people to throw in too, sooner or later.

That’s where the fun is. Everything about the NPCs goes for villains, doubled, more than doubled, squared, more than squared, cubed.

- Love their villainous asses. They are your babies, they are what you want in a comic, specifically this comic. At least while you’re directly playing them, be on their side.
- At the same time, some, at least, maybe most, are despicable. Not to some perceived audience, not to some editorial mandate, but to you. Yes, “be on their side” is one of those tricky things sometimes.
• They’re situated in recognizable concerns of the location and the whole context of play as much as the heroes, or even more so.
• They aren’t stupid. They want things, they care about things, and in some way those things make sense. Not just to the characters, but to you.
• They’re cool. Whether genuinely socially with-it and worthy of respect, or scary-cool because they are just that psycho and bad-ass, or sympathetic-cool, what’s called a Woobie, because they have suffered so much more than anyone should ever, ever have to, more than the heroes for sure.

We’ve seen how the player-characters treat people and how they’re living, voluntarily or otherwise. That will matter a lot now that a more concrete, super-powers relevant problem is happening. This problem is one or both of these.

• Super-powered people or powerful organizations are doing something they would have been doing anyway, based either on previous events in play or some event that isn’t directly connected to the heroes.
• Some tension among super-powered people or powerful organizations is kicked into extreme action due to how the heroes or well-known NPCs interact with them during play.

It’s fine to plan a complicated, external crisis all set to go to land on the heroes’ doorstep for the session, but a lot can be developed from in-play events, from recent play or within this very session. Think of introducing an off-kilter academic who’s toying with the chemical formula that could make him a cold-fusion mutated jellyfish man … and seeing whether he snaps based on the events of play or not. It’s less “safe” if what you want is a reliable fight scene at the halfway-mark of your play time, but it’s more fun, enriches the social and emotional environment of the characters, and makes far more use of what role-playing has to offer.

A lot of coincidence is involved in any story creation process, especially high-action melodrama. The problem has to be located somewhere that’s accessible to the main characters, for instance. A Champions session pops, as opposed to limping through yet another hook into yet another arena match, when the players’ characters’ actions matter to how the conflicts arise and exactly to how they confront them.

That can’t come from the GM, but from players’ actions. How do they follow up on what occurs? What are they looking for or working on anyway? Think along this rough spectrum.

• The characters don’t do much to follow up on news items, information, problems, or interactions in play. Nor do they conduct investigations or projects of their own.
  o Result: if and when a crisis occurs, it’s not nearby and they are engaged in other difficult or important things at the time.
  o This effect can vary individually. Danger Sense is a good example if the character is in the vicinity of the problem for some other reason. The other factors are Luck and Unluck – if the former kicks in, then that character alone is in a good position to perceive and deal with the crisis; if the latter does, then that character alone is nailed directly by the crisis in some way (but is at least there).
• The characters, or some of them, are proactive about investigating things all the time, and engaging with their own projects in ways which bring them into contact with people (or whatever).
  o Results: the skill outcomes, especially Detective Work, determine whether any of the characters are well-situated and well-informed, perhaps even before the crisis
fully develops, and whether they have time to organize a shared response if they’re inclined to.

Neither is good or bad play – it reflects how the players want their characters to be, and playing accordingly honors that choice, the setting, and the system. The important point is not to let coincidence do all the work no matter what, so you hand them a “you are here,” no-strings problem regardless of their own activities.

Look at how much my GM has to work with, from Miasma! We have the whole ex-villain thing, including a bad temper about it, and her former teammates the Wild Side. We’ve got the now-depowered hero Polar Star who’s sponsored or mentored her for the Chicago super-group. There are her kid and her ex-husband Daniel, who harasses her through his support group.

And that’s just one hero out of the bunch, most of whom are built to be more idealistic and perhaps establishmentarian than Miasma. But each presents just as rich and with any luck, as intriguing profiles of back-story, attitude, supporting characters, and colorful powers. (In a real game, the other players would make them up, but for this example, I’ll name a few – One Man, Hope, and Thingama-Bob.)

Our example game is defined to be about the police, law, crime, and what that entails right here and now. Yeah, it’s “political,” it kind of has to be – your game might not be, depending on what you chose for your opening statements.

Pretending I’m the GM, that gets me thinking about the villain group named in Miasma’s Disadvantages, the Wild Side, considering that she was involved with them. Going by my knowledge of Chicago events, I decide that they were founded as part of Occupy (which was suppressed in Chicago), and became something similar to the 1970s group Weather, especially to the Chicago chapter which waged a long-standing feud with the city police.

While writing this, I can’t help it, villain creation starts right away. I instantly conceive a member of the Wild Side, called Fireballs, a disgruntled young lawyer whose frustration and hipster irony are now brought to the purposes of mayhem. His teammates are called Doctor Meat, She Walks in Beauty, Change, and Battle Scar.

Deep Dive

There is a hard, obvious line between “nothing happens until the GM says” vs. “what do you do.” It’s defined by having what the player-characters do having significant effects on the circumstances of play. If all play before the fight is just roads to Rome to get to that fight, then the players will rightly check out until then, no matter how thespian the GM gets with this or that NPC. But if what the players get from interacting and investigating ties directly into how the conflict is met, or better, what the conflict even is, then they will seize the day faster than most GMs are prepared to believe.

Every comics professional says the following thing: the villains always work if you think of them as the hero, even if you have to bend your mind a little psycho-wise to get there.

Anything can happen in superhero comics, limited only by your collective standards for saying so. The danger lies in introducing fantastic stuff that has nothing to do with anything. If it strikes right to what a given character may know, feel, or want; or if it exaggerates real-life problems or issues that the group wants to deal with, then no matter how bizarre, it won’t be lame.
You may be wondering where “heroes don’t kill,” “uphold the law,” and anything similar may be ... because they’re not here. The mandates and expectations of genre come out of play, they don’t get plastered on top of it, so you’ll have to find out what that message or morality turns out to be for yourself. It starts with those two leading statements for preparation, gets shaped by the characters’ concepts and builds, and then punches home only through play itself, under no single person’s control.
Conflicts in the combat

Ordering

Fights begin with the presumption that everyone piles into it almost simultaneously, but after that first moment, individual differences in speed make a difference.

The sequencing unit is called a segment, and we consider twelve of them at a time, because the very important characteristic called Recovery is presumed to activate at the close of the twelfth. You refer to a segment by number as if it were a location, as in, “on 5,” “on 12,” et cetera.

So, to begin a fight, we all start on 12. It so happens that everyone gets an action on 12, so within a segment, we go in order from highest Dexterity to lowest. Recovery activates at the end of that segment, so then we will pull into 1, then 2, and on up to 12 and the Recovery again.

You don’t get to go every segment. That’s what Speed is for – the number of segments you get, which are ordered like so:

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A segment you’re active on is called a, or rather your Phase. Find your Speed and read across, and the X’s are your Phases. Lots of things occur until the start or end of “your next Phase,” so it’s important vocabulary.

So it’s pretty easy once you’re in it – “All right, that’s the end of Segment 2, we’re on Segment 3,” and everyone whose Phases include 3 takes action from highest Dexterity to lowest, then we all go to Segment 4 to see who’s got a Phase then.
It’s helpful to relax the notion that segments represent a metronome of fictional time, and instead to consider that all “unoccupied” segments don’t exist. Phases then make more sense as potential comics panels, or sets of panels which are closely tied together.

Obviously, you need to know how much you can do on a “go,” which breaks down like this.

**Full Phase**
- Full Move
- Move-By or Move-Through (any distance up to full Move)
- Recover from being Stunned
- Voluntary Recovery (no Phase actions permitted)
- Use the Variable Power Pool skill
- Use most skills

**½ Phase**
- ½ Move (any distance up to half Move)
- Attack
- Grab
- Block
- Dodge
- Break free (Strength or Ego)
- Martial Attack
- Martial Throw
- Martial Block
- Martial Dodge
- Actively sense something
- Use the Acrobatics skill (requires 2” move minimum)

**0 Phase**
- Turning a power on or off
- Shifting values within a Multipower
- Pushing a power or characteristic as an add-on to an action
- Making an Ego roll associated with an action, e.g., pushing extra

Attacking is also the “stopper” – if you attack first, it’s still a ½ Phase action, but you can’t do a following ½ Phase action or 0 Phase action. Except for that constraint, the above options can be freely mixed and matched.

The ordering of actions can be tricky, because there’s a potential stop-motion, freeze-frame effect. There are only a few ways to act off-turn and to adjust your position in the Speed chart. To keep things dynamic, understand how they work and work them hard.

**Delayed actions (finish at end of next Segment)**
- Haymaker
- Superleap

**Held actions**
- You may choose to go after the point when your Dexterity permits during a Phase, in which case you can either “step in” just after someone else goes, or pre-empt someone whose action is about to come up
• You may cancel your action, or the rest of your action if you made no attacks, for the current Phase in order to go on a later Segment that is not your Phase and comes before your next Phase.
  - If you wait until your next Phase starts, the “saved” action or portion of it is lost.
• One of the above two options is necessary in order to coordinate attacks.
• Any combination of ordinarily-permitted actions is allowed when you do act.
• You cannot hold a ½ Phase action by itself, i.e., doing a ½ Phase action and holding “the rest.” To hold an action, you have to give it all up at its default arrival, even if all you do with it later is a ½ Phase action.

Reactivity
• When an attack catches you during a segment that isn’t your Phase, and you have no held action, you may cancel your next entire Phase to perform a defensive combat maneuver (Dodge, Block, the martial version of either of those, or Martial Throw) or to turn on a defensive power (Force Field, Force Wall, Desolid, Shrinking, or anything like that).
  - You can’t use a movement power.
  - Ordinary movement is restricted to 2” (therefore Acrobatics may be included).
  - It includes getting attacked during your own Phase before it’s your turn, so your canceled Phase is the current one; this option isn’t available once you’ve done anything during a Phase.
• Attacks with the Reactive Advantage may be employed with this maneuver

Free actions – stated and carried out at any time
• Passive sensing, including Danger Sense
• Responsive roll required by another’s action
  - This includes Missile Deflection, although it is restricted to a single use between your Phases
• Defend oneself as represented by Defensive Combat Value and Defensive Ego Combat Value
• Speaking (“Monologue”)
• Presence Attack

Positioning
The rules presume using a hex map for most situations of play, in which the real-world scale is an inch per hex, and a hex represents two meters of fictional space. That’s why the distance units are given in inches; it’s referring to what the real people would be counting and measuring on the map. A lot of what goes on in super-combat is choreography, and knowing who’s where, whether they’re in motion and how much, can be an art of its own.

Back in the Eighties, something funny happened at the tables – a lot of us stopped using the hex map, instead relying on someone’s knowledge of a given real-world location, or analogizing one’s knowledge to apply to the fictional location, or sometimes, a real-world map (like those schematic ones you get from public transit). We still used the distance rules and the terminology of hexes and inches, but would ask, “So how many hexes is it across that street,” or, given a position perched on streetlamp, “That’s about five inches down and across to that guy,” meaning about ten meters.

It’s up to every play group to find the right point between the physical map vs. theater of the mind, and to wiggle the following rules so they fit.

• Range modifiers, with the default set at -1/3”.
• Area attacks of all sorts, each of which covers a designated area and differing degrees of effect.
• That odd stop-motion effect applies to continuous movement from Phase to Phase. Is the character moving while he or she cannot otherwise “go?” If not, what does that even look like?
  o Do Superleap and Knockback occur more-or-less instantaneously, or do they take another segment to travel and land?
  o At maximum or near-maximum speed, having counted the hexes you’ve zoomed to at the end of your movement action, how much farther do you get before the next phase, and if nothing, then where “are” you in between if a bunch of other characters get to go?
  o When starting a move-based attack, how much impact can you rely on if you haven’t managed to get very far before hitting? Do you need some room to build up enough momentum?

For the first few points, if a group is not inclined to use a battle map, then dialogue and perhaps a whiteboard are sufficient to handle it. For the final point, there are two schools of solutions. One is to think of the segments as fixed-in-fiction time and to consider distance, acceleration/deceleration, and momentum, between points of player-choice (i.e., Phase-based actions). Or one can embrace the comics-panel logic of the Speed chart and think of the Phases as “what we see,” e.g. when the attack or movement lands, letting the in-between fall into the gutters of the panels and thus not bother our heads with it. Both have their advocates and their virtues.

Hitting and not hitting
The basics go like this. When you can go, you can:

• Stay where you are and do any half-Phase or full-Phase action
  o If the first half-Phase action isn’t an attack, you can do another one, attack or otherwise
  o If it’s an attack, you’re done
• Move up to half your movement allowance and do a half-Phase action
• Do a half-Phase action that isn’t an attack and then move up to half your movement allowance

You have to roll 3d6 to target anyone or anything successfully, comparing Combat Values to arrive at the right target number. When you hit (the target or something else, often something else), roll more dice to determine the damage. Typically the target will have some degree of “soak” style defense which reduces the amount, and subtracts what’s left from a score.

A character’s base Combat Value is Dexterity divided by 3, and he or she also has Ego Combat Value at Ego divided by 3.

• To hit someone, add your Combat Value to 11, subtract theirs, and that’s the target number for rolling 3d6. Equal to that value or below hits.
• For each such attempt, your value is Offensive CV (thus OCV or OECV), and theirs is Defensive (DCV or DECV).

But the base value is hardly ever enough. There are tons of fast-and-momentary adjustments based on position, choice of action, supportive skill levels, timing, and effects of prior actions.

Maneuvers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offensive CV</th>
<th>Defensive CV</th>
<th>Damage/notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
### Punch (any straightforward close attack)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offensive CV</th>
<th>Defensive CV</th>
<th>Damage/notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+0</td>
<td>+0</td>
<td>1x damage</td>
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</table>

### Grab

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Damage/notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>May be followed by squeeze or throw</td>
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### Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offensive CV</th>
<th>Defensive CV</th>
<th>Damage/notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+0</td>
<td>+0</td>
<td>No attack</td>
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### Dodge

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+0</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>No attack</td>
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### Interesting Maneuvers

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<tr>
<td>Area effect attack</td>
<td>½ range modifier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haymaker</td>
<td>+0</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brace</td>
<td>+1; 2x range modifier</td>
<td>Drops to 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set</td>
<td>+1; 2x range modifier</td>
<td>+0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move-By</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move-Through</td>
<td>- velocity/5</td>
<td>-3</td>
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### Martial Maneuvers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offensive CV</th>
<th>Defensive CV</th>
<th>Damage/notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Martial punch</td>
<td>+0</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martial kick</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martial block</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martial dodge</td>
<td>+0</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martial throw</td>
<td>+ velocity/5</td>
<td>+0</td>
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### This and that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Move before attacking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acrobatics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skill levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinated attacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autofire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bouncing attacks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Spreading attacks | +1 OCV per decreased damage die or per extra adjacent target
Surprise moves | +1 to +3 OCV bonus
Prone | ½ DCV
Stunned or Flashing | DCV drops to 0

They’re all cumulative. The net effects are extremely dramatic, but it’s kind of a lot. A bunch of little counters to shove around for plus and minus can really help.

In case you’re wondering, there is no helpful point-pool for a player to grab bonuses from. The GM is encouraged, however, to throw in a +1 every so often out of sheer excitement regarding what is going on. Don’t negotiate about it or plead for it – this is another one of those loosey-goosey special effects concepts, taken up to the level of anything at all that happens to be fun at this particular moment.

Successful attacks are assessed for damage and other effects like Knockback based on the powers being used. Don’t forget that missed attacks may well hit something. So a miss is often an important event in a fight.

Resources
There are so many ways your character can be taken out of a dangerous confrontation …

Losing Stun is a foregone conclusion, and in small doses it has no immediate effect. However, if, after defenses, you take Stun damage that equals or exceeds your Constitution, you’re Stunned.

- Your Defensive Combat Values drop to 0.
- All active Powers that cost Endurance turn off.
- You may not move or do anything during your next Phase.
  - This Phase is called “recovery from being Stunned,” but you do not add Recovery to Stun or Endurance.

Predictably, if your Stun is taken down to 0, you’re knocked out.

- Your Endurance drops to 0.
- You can Recover at the end of segment 12, to be at your Recovery value for both Stun and Endurance.
  - But you can only do that once in a fight. Get knocked out again, and you’re an insensate hulk until such a time as the GM says otherwise.

The other kind of injury you take comes off Body, which is considered real tissue-trauma injury, and when a character is at 0 Body, they’re dying. Their Endurance drops to 0 and their Stun to 1, unless it was at 0. This condition is not automatically fatal, but the character cannot do anything but talk, and then only if they have positive Stun.

- Actually dying is elective – at the player’s choice, whether for a target of the player’s character who’s been hurt by them, or for the character who’s been hurt.
- A non-player-character hurt by another non-player-character or some environmental effect lives or dies at the GM’s whim.
- Adverse circumstances afterward may prevent a dying character from becoming functional again until they receive specific care or some condition based on the injury’s special effects, at the GM’s judgment.
Powers, characteristics, and certain innate values like Running can also be reduced through Drains and Transfers. Aside from the obvious effects, they may be taken down to 0. A base characteristic taken to 0 is rendered non-functional unless the character makes an Ego roll, at which point it may be used at that value.

Absent relevant special effects or modifiers like Destructive, reduced features are restored by Recovery just like Stun.

Finally, one thing you can be sure of through the course of the segments is that everyone is burning Endurance like mad. You have to do that just to move and fight at all, or when you try to break free of things using Strength or Ego. Even missed attacks spend the stuff!

The only good part is that powers which require Endurance only cost you on your Phases, not on the segments in between. (That’s the comics panels logic coming in again.)

Then there’s Pushing, which you can do with any action that requires Endurance. You can get up to 10 more points that way, with a cost of 1 Endurance per point. And if that’s not enough, make an Ego roll – the difference between your roll and the target number gives you that many more points to use, at the same Endurance cost.

Try to do something without Endurance to back it up, and the energy will come off Stun instead, determined by taking 1d6 Stun damage per 2 “Endurance” used.

That’s why Recovery is a big deal. At the end of segment 12, everyone gets Stun and Endurance back equal to his or her Recovery, as well as “repair” to anything that might have been Drained or Transferred.

Not to put a fine point on it, but that’s not going to be enough. You can also take an action to recover during a Phase, for the same effect, meaning, you don’t do anything else that Phase. But that’s not going to be enough either.

Therefore super-fights are a race against your own reserves, villains included. If opponents make it past the first full-powered furious assaults, they’re sucking wind and fearing a solid hit. All that stuff about surprise maneuvers and what you’re knocked into becomes make-or-break, and the fight then transforms from mutual assault into a ruthless dance of timing, recovery, use of skills, covering allies, defense, ambush, and set-up, ending in sudden, individual takedowns.

One last point about resources: values do not go into negatives. Base characteristics will Recover from 0, unless the power which reduced them was Destructive. Stun and Endurance do not “build back up to zero” via Recovery from negative values, but follow the all-or-nothing rules described above.

Interaction and influence
This is comics, so the words on a page don’t care how long it takes to read them. The system does this too, not just because a paragraph and a half spoken as the hero flips in mid-air is funny, but because fights are part of confrontations, not just choreography for its own sake.
Speaking (called “monologue” but including dialogue), using Danger Sense, reactive rolls of all kinds, and Presence Attacks use no game time at all. And unlike 0 Phase actions, which must be performed according to the Speed chart and the various modifying rules, these may be performed at any time. You can do it in tandem with any action. You can even do it when you’re Recovering.

When communication is involved, whoever you want to perceive what you’re saying will do so, absent obvious circumstances otherwise. Danger Sense, for example, can serve everyone you want, when you shout a warning. Any relevant information you perceive or find out can be delivered, no matter who is punching whom or currently clawing their way out from under a ton of debris. And you can give all the information if you have to, without the need for a stopwatch at the table.

“Don’t do it, Death-Skull! She’s – your daughter!” “Gasp! You swore you’d never tell!” “My ... daughter? But they told me you were dead!” And the whole fight changes.

Take a look at Presence, sometimes tagged as the most significant mechanic in the game, with good reason.

A Presence Attack is rolled directly, like Strength, at 1d6 per 5 points. It must represent a strong emotion or resolve. It may or may not include a command, depending on what is said, if anything.

The modifiers matter greatly, as circumstances may yield surprising combinations for them.

-1d6 you’re in combat
-1d6 you’re at a current disadvantage
-1d6 you have a weak reputation
-1d6 for a repeated specific Presence Attack (cumulative)
-3d6 what you say is directly contradicts the prevailing mood of the target(s)
+1d6 they’re surprised
+1d6 you’re exhibiting a power
+1d6 you’re doing some violent action
+2d6 as above, but very
+3d6 as above, but very very
+1d6 good soliloquy (makes sense, well-suited to listeners)
+2d6 as above, but excellent
+3d6 as above, but incredible
+1d6 setting is appropriate
+2d6 setting is very appropriate
+2d6 they’re already retreating or thinking about it
+4d6 they’re already retreating

Some of these are obviously more suited to telling people something specific, and others to just wowing them into inaction, but note how important that soliloquy and setting are. You’re penalized a lot when trying to Presence Attack someone who’s punching you and hates your guts, but ... say the right thing at the right time, and you just might.

The direct effect goes like this, with each including the lower levels.

1x the Target’s Presence: impressed; opponents may act before the target this Phase if applicable
2x the Target’s Presence: very impressed, will consider the content of the Attack seriously; will lose ½ Phase action this Phase or whichever Phase they act next if that doesn’t apply.
• 3x the Target’s Presence: awed and inclined to obey, however briefly; will lose 1 full Phase action and drop DCV to half value.
• 4x the Target’s Presence: cowed, may surrender, run away, or faint; DCV drops to 0.

Everyone who perceives it is affected, but those it’s directed against are reduced in effect by one step. (Yes, your own allies may be a bit gobsmacked when you do the things you need for big dice bonuses, and you may end up going before Mr. Speed-Hero for once.)

The rules’ implications are legion, with ripple effects that I can only ask you to try and observe in play. Sacrificing Endurance may be the guts of a super confrontation, but Presence is its heart.

_Thinking about Miasma in combat is pretty clear, that she’s all about the Stealth, Find Weakness, and using her Darkness/Illusions to confuse and distract. Her signature would be the well-timed, ruthless ambush. She lacks automatic defenses, so she relies on being hard to target, and upon shifting to Desolid when attacked._

**Deep Dive**

TV and movies exert a disproportionate pull on our imaginations – perhaps too much. While playing this game, when you’re describing things, try to shake that off a little, and reference comics instead. Think about artists and pages and panels. The rules are built to support it, and you can make that otherwise troublesome stop-motion effect work in play’s favor. Think about what comics can do that the moving-visual media cannot.

Getting knocked back, ending up prone, and being Stunned, as well as one’s position relative to exploding fuel or falling objects, are often more important than simply taking this or that amount of Stun from direct attacks. Working such content goes a long way to even the odds against an opponent with higher attack rolls, more dice of damage, and more points of defense than you have.

There is no single “willpower” value in the game. Instead, the rules for Pushing, Ego combat, rolls to break free of things, and Presence interact to generate a qualitative and quantitative emergent version of a character’s will. The acts that call these rules into play will be obvious and impressive. As a GM, respond intuitively with your NPCs’ and villains’ opinions, including altering their current view of the character. As a player, consider including a Presence Attack whenever you use Ego or really burn Endurance, and consider deeply what you want to say.

Point for point, pound for pound, villains should outmatch heroes. If the heroes wade in mindlessly, swinging and blasting, trusting to their soak-style defenses, the numbers should dictate that they lose. That doesn’t mean the villains can fight blindly; they have Endurance to manage and all those maneuvers and positioning effects to consider too. But when it comes to the numerical edge, they have it, not the heroes.

Beware the common habit of softening losses or handing over victories in combat, usually in terms of managing “where the story goes.” Instead, let the results fall where they may, and play your NPCs according to what they want and how they want to get it. That’s tied to the real question: what is any given fight about? The villains don’t want to fight in order to win fights; they have goals to strive for and problems to solve. That’s why prior events and current relationships are incredibly important – even the most ruthless villain may care a lot about the fate of one or more heroes, or be influenced by their shared relationships with another character.
Refining the mechanics

You learned about one Power Framework already, the Elemental Control. Here are two others. Perhaps predictably, you can’t put one Framework inside another, and no powers can share or split slots across more than one Framework. Skills cannot be included in Frameworks.

The **Variable Power Pool** is the logical extension of the Elemental Control; it might even be thought of as the ultimate Champions design concept. It is, simply, a way to choose whatever powers you want and which you can pay for out of a common pool of points.

• Like an Elemental Control, it’s conceptually governed by a single special effect.
• All powers are eligible.
• The cost of the current array of powers may not exceed the value of the Pool.
• The array of powers may be changed outside of combat, in relative calm.
• You may buy a skill for 5 points which begins at 11- and which may be used to alter the array of powers as a ½ Phase action during combat or other stressful situations.
  o This must be a new skill, not on the list; give it a special effects appropriate name

Once you’ve stated what powers are currently available, you’re stuck with them until you get a chance to change them in the ways described above.

The pool itself is bought as a chunk of points, and half that amount is bought in addition, called the Control Cost.

The two most satisfying ways to manage a VPP are to go really big or really small. First, with at least a third of your total points invested this way, it’s the foundation for just about anything about the character, replacing the whole idea of purchasing a line-item list with a basket of “what shall I do with my power-concept this time.” You’d probably have several significant powers available at any given time, and when you consolidate the points into a single power, it’s a rare and perhaps even world-changing event. The details of the Control Cost would be keenly relevant to every situation your character’s in, and his or her flexibility and force would be legendary.

The easiest concept for such a construction is “mastery,” as in “master of” some relatively abstract or dramatic force, but it can apply less grandly too, for characters whose imaginative use of their special effects is so constant and fun that it arguably reaches into the powers-list all the time anyway.

The other way is to have only 20 or 30 points in the Pool, making it a small “wonder power” with minor but useful effects.

The **Multipower** is a limited VPP, if you want your power to trade off commitment among effects in a zero-sum game, and if you want those effects to be pretty fixed in terms of rules rather than wide-open. It’s very good for characters who change body forms or utilize power-sets based on shifting themes.
The pool is a single set of points, and each power that draws on it is bought as a “slot,” which costs the amount in the pool divided by 5.

- It’s conceptually governed by a special effect, which must include a context or reason that the powers in it represent a trade-off.
  - E.g., a distinctive source of power whose energies may be shaped into different if rather inflexible forms, or a limited number of body forms with a distinctive power or two each, or a weapon with different types of attack.
- All powers are eligible, but each is named and fixed in place as a slot; you cannot decide to use powers out of the general list as you can with a VPP.
  - Characteristics are eligible too, or part of a Characteristic’s total value.
- The array of powers cannot be changed as an action during play, only through experience points.
- You can use any of the powers at once as long as their total cost doesn’t exceed the pool’s total.
  - You can vary each power’s amount freely within that constraint, although sometimes the concept is more fixed than that, and you just switch fixed amounts to whichever powers you’re using.

The only play-problem with the Multipower is that it’s too easily used as a cheap bandolier for diverse attacks. The solution lies in the fictional downside of not having one power or power-set because you’re using another, or of having two or more reduced from full power because you’re using them at the same time. For example, for the gun/ammo concept, the special effect may result in not being able to switch back to a slot you’ve already used, as you’re now “out” of that kind.

**Modifiers: Advantages and Limitations**

Modifiers alter how a characteristic or power works, which is then reflected in its point-cost. They aren’t detachable at will; once established, that feature works that way. To have different modified versions of Blast, for instance, you’ll need to buy each Blast.

These are near and dear to the Champions system, and it may seem odd to you to have waited until after explaining combat and whatnot to get into them. However, if you forget that the Modifiers express the special effects rather than establish them, that heart is killed dead in the game’s chest. I won’t go so far as to say you should play without them first, but … well, theoretically, it would be a good idea, even if I wouldn’t do it and can’t expect you to.

Modified Characteristics are a great way to tie your character directly into more special effects and to strengthen that “three-cornered” concept.

- The classic example is to make one’s Strength Armor-Piercing, making the whole property-destruction thing so much easier, punching an oncoming missile into shrapnel, that sort of thing.
  - In this case, the Advantage applies to all of Strength, base score included. E.g., for 40 points of Strength, the added Armor-Piercing cost will be figured from 40, not just from the 30 points you spent to bring it to 40 from 10.
- Conversely, you can apply Modifiers to part of a characteristic’s value, so that its casual use is reasonably good or super, but its full value displays a unique rules-profile in action.

The following vocabulary becomes necessary.
• Active Cost includes the power with its Advantages; when applicable, it determines the power's Endurance cost to use
• Real Cost includes the power with its Advantages and Limitations, which is what you pay for it with points

That leads to a crucial concept and hard limit for your collective and unique game: the ratio of the two. It’s calculated as [the total Active Cost divided by the total Real Cost], \( \times 100 \) just to make it easy to think about in terms of percent.

Starting player-characters’ ratios should not exceed 118. As they improve, allow some wiggling past it perhaps, but then requiring it to wiggle back down. If you want to allow a higher standard for your game, that’s fine, but I recommend trying it this way first.

Villains’ ratios can be taken up to 125, for several reasons, all of which make them very good adversaries. If you prefer a higher ratio limit for the player characters, then the villains should have a doubled difference over 100 for their limit.

*Remember the key point! A character in powered armor, for example, does not have to express that detail through Modifiers. Any and all logical outcomes of using powered armor can be reserved for opportunistic, point-free special effects as they occur in play. This applies to every imaginable concept for powers.*

Advantages are end-runs and expansions for powers.

• Bigger/more: more area, more penetration, more shots fired ... just beefing it up: Autofire, Area Effect, No Normal Defense, Armor-Piercing, Destructive, Hardened Defense, No Endurance Cost, Continuous
• Removing a constraint, e.g., Affects Desolid, Ranged, Increased Knockback
• Adapted into a new concept: Usable on Others (positive or negative), Based on Ego

An advantaged power gets an increased cost in points, as follows:

\[
\text{Active Cost} = \text{base cost} \times (1 + \text{sum of advantage ratings})
\]

For example, if Miasma’s Vaporous Gas Jet is given the advantage Extra Knockback, set at \( \frac{1}{4} \), then its cost of 40 is multiplied by 1.25, for an Active Cost of 50. Miasma now has to expend 10 Endurance to gas-jet someone, not 8.

Limitations do limit how powers are used, but they aren’t merely “bad” things. They shape the use and context of powers in individualized ways.

• Making a power iffy or inconvenient: Activation, Burnout, Always On, Extra Endurance, No Range, Only in Hero Identity
• Linked: when a power can only be used when another specific power of equal or greater Active Cost is in use  
  o The non-linked power cannot be Always On or otherwise constantly in use  
  o No attack powers may be linked; as described earlier, combining powers into attacks is free
• Focus means a power’s source can be taken away, or rather, **will be**, and its point-structure reflects how that will happen
o Obvious/Inobvious concerns whether the source of the power can be easily spotted when it’s used; an inobvious focus can be identified with a relevant skill or characteristic roll
o Accessible/Inaccessible concerns whether the source can be grabbed with an action; an inaccessible focus can be removed if the character is impaired (Stunned, Knocked Out, anything like that).

• Limited power is the playground of the system: any conditions for when a power will or will not work
  o The conditions must be an obvious feature of the starting statements of play or of the available powers of possible adversaries
  o It’s all-or-nothing: there is no maybe about the power becoming available or unavailable, as “half effect” or minor-penalty judgment situations are covered by the special effects rules for all powers

You may be interested in establishing Limits for a power that uses ammunition and thus might run out, in which case Burnout, some version of Limited Power, and perhaps a version of Focus will do well.

**The power’s Real Cost is determined by Active cost \( \div (1 + \text{sum of limitation ratings}) \)**

When you have both Advantages and Disadvantages together, calculate the Active Cost first, in full, and only then divide to determine the Real Cost.

**Applying Modifiers to Power Frameworks**
A Modifier cannot be included “naked” as a feature of a Framework. Advantages are intrinsic to the cost of a given power, and Limitations modify the designated part of a Framework that holds the power.

For the Variable Power Pool, the pool itself cannot be modified, so its cost is its cost. The control cost can be modified with Limitations.

• The current array of powers can only be changed with special circumstances: e.g., touching target, environmental circumstance, extra time and effort
• New array of powers depends on circumstances (GM’s choice)
• Any Limitations may be designated to affect all powers ever created using the VPP, in which case the Limitations’ value are applied to the Control Cost.

A power built from the VPP can include any Advantages, retaining the constraint that Active Cost cannot exceed the pool’s value. It can also include any Limitations, which is a big deal because Limitations bring down the cost of each power, permitting many more powers to be available at once. The governing constraints to these Modifiers are the special effects of the VPP itself and whatever Limitations have been applied to the Control Cost.

Elemental Control is the most complex. You have to build it with the Advantages first, recognizing that the “discount” may only be as high as half the Active Cost of the smallest power that’s included. This can lead to some scribbling as you figure out how high you want the discount to be.

Then you apply the discount to every power, so now you have the Active Cost of the whole thing.
Limitations may be applied to the whole Elemental Control, so now the cost of the EC itself as well as of the discounted cost of every power gets that cost reduction. But an individual power may have its own Limitations too, so its Real Cost has to include all the Limitations, general and specific, at once.

Compared to the others, the rules for modifying a Multipower are pretty easy.

- The Active Cost of a power defined as a slot in the Multipower, including its Advantages, cannot exceed the value of the pool itself.
- An entire Multipower can be given any Limitation, affecting the cost of the pool as well as each of the slots. A slot’s cost cannot be reduced with Limitations by itself.

Here’s Miasma re-done with Modifiers

**Strength 15, Dexterity 23, Constitution 25, Body 10, Intelligence 10, Ego 20 [only after recovery from being Enraged 1], Presence 20, Speed 5**

Cost = $5 + 39 + 30 + 10* + 5 + 15 = 109$

**Defense 5, Recovery 8, Endurance 50, Stun 30**

**Skills:** Stealth and Find Weakness

Cost = 15

**Enhanced Senses:** vision, broad spectrum, 360 degrees [only from inside Scary Cloud ½] 13

**Ego Defense 7**

**Knockback Resistance -4” 10**

**Elemental Control for narcotic mists 20**

- Vaporous Gas Jet: Energy Blast 8d6 [increased knockback ½] [only from inside Scary Cloud ¼] 22
- Scary Cloud: Darkness 2” radius + Mental Illusions 4d6 [no range for either ½] 13
- Nightmare Walker: Desolidification + Force Field 10 [burnout on both ½], 13
- Is She Really Here: Teleportation + Flash 1d6 20

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<th>Advantage</th>
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<th>Discounted Cost</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaporous Gas Jet</td>
<td>9d6</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>-20</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>Only from inside Cloud</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scary Cloud</td>
<td>2” + 4d6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>No range</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightmare Walker</td>
<td>Desolid</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Burnout (mild)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total = 81

= 126 and that makes 235

So the 45-point Vaporous Gas Jet with its advantage costs 67.5 (45 x 1.5), is reduced to 47.5 by subtracting the Elemental Control (67.5-20), and then the 47.5 is reduced to 32 (47.5 divided by 1.5). Whereas the Scary Cloud and the Nightmare Walker are brought down to 20 by the Elemental Control (40-20), and then their Limitations reduce that to 13 in each case (20 divided by 1.5).
I didn’t put a Limitation on the whole Elemental Control, partly because that would have jacked the Active/Real ratio way up, but also because I simply don’t want her powers as a whole to be limited. If she were a villain, I would have done it.

I could have done a lot with the points that were “saved” points through the Limitations, and I did a little of that by increasing the power of the Vaporous Gas Jet. However, if you farm such points into things with Limitations of their own too much, you’ll jack up the ratio fast. You can see that I raised her Presence a lot and her Ego Defense a little, reinforcing what I consider to be important powers/personality traits and keeping the ratio manageable.

Miasma’s ratio is 278/235 x 100 = 118.2, for a good example of extensive Modifiers kept in the permitted range, and also of enhancing the special effects that the powers and characteristics had anyway. It’s reinforced even more by the crossover between Characteristics and Disadvantages. Her “three corners” are now uniquely formed into a unified, rather striking character.

I worked up Fireballs this way. Given a higher limit for the ratio, and a more quirky personality, the result is ... terrifying.

---

**Deep Dive**

Don’t let the Variable Power Pool scare you. It’s actually the default build for any character.

Don’t get distracted by the Focus Limitation. None of the items wielded or worn by your favorite comics heroes matches the rules-limitations of a focus. Various consequences of them being objects are easily played as special effects, e.g., not having them immediately on hand once in a while. Better Limitations for such things are Burnout, Only in Hero Identity, and colorful Limited Power concepts that punch home the special effects; Focus should apply at most to some specific application of a power. Focus as the governing Limitation for having a power at all works best as a way for villains to be more powerful than a hero in Active Points, but also for those powers to be uniquely vulnerable to a thinking hero.

Look out for the standard oopses with math. Rounding is the perennial problem – do all the math first, with its nasty decimals, and round off only at the end.

Another glitch is to try to balance/subtract the Advantage and Limitation fractions first. Say you have a ¾ advantage and a ¼ limitation; you can’t take the difference and calculate it as a ½ advantage. With a 40 point power, the correct result is 56 points, not 60.

Here’s a grim truth: the character’s total points don’t mean anything, and there’s no trick to builds. Nor is it a game on its own, some kind of cross between Sudoku and paper dolls; it’s not like you get a prize for packing this-many into that-many through Frameworks and Modifiers.

The question is not what the character can do, but but he or she will do. What they will become matters more than what they are. The only reason for all this math is for any character to be as much fun in play as possible – with the special effects opening it up for who knows what immediate adjustments, and the modifiers locking down the ones you want to be reliable. That goes for all the characters, villains and heroes alike.

---

A world of things
In a violent situation, objects and environments are best understood as characters who are at least as dangerous and reactive as the walking-and-talking opponents. Whether you’re using maps with all the objects neatly noted, or theater-of-the-mind where movie theater lobbies have whatever you know they have in them, the group needs easy, fun answers to questions about the available things, like, is it there, can I have it, how far away is it? Those should not even be questions.

The rule is, whether you’re using a map or not, if you’re somewhere where this particular thing is strongly implied to be, then it is. Office corridor? Water cooler. Busy highway? Lampposts, and incidentally, cars. Military airport hangar? Oh goodness. You don’t have to ask, “Is there a jet fighter” here, or “can I get to it.” “Is it” and “can I” are boring questions; so get past them with as much “yes” as makes even the least sense. A little Luck, either kind, can even push that envelope.

If and when such questions are tactically important, e.g., someone else is trying to get to it or break it first, then resolve them with the ordinary rules, and let details like distance be a post-hoc justification rather than a determining factor.

What to do with the things you find isn’t boring at all. The Defense and Body of things in the chart at the end of this document, and your extrapolations from them, are set to work with characters’ effects on them, and vice versa. They don’t function as a Lego set for building landscapes and are not precisely tuned to materials, thicknesses, et cetera – what you need is how to heave’em at each other and how much that hurts.

Given a solid thought-space of where is it, who’s there, where is everyone more-or-less situated, who or what is going where, and what looks like it’s about to happen, Strength turns out to be a much more imaginative power than you might have thought. The basic rule is easy: most of the time, hitting things, throwing things, and crushing things all do damage based on the Strength you were using.

- Striking someone with a Strength-based Maneuver does Knockback inches equal to the Body rolled minus 2d6.
- The things chart shows the Strength needed to lift something, which extrapolates to +5 to heave it (3” throw) and +5 more to throw a goodly distance.
- An aerodynamic object can target a person or something like that, but a non-aerodynamic object targets hexes appropriate to its size.
  - Either way has its benefits or drawbacks, but most obviously range of the throw is much less for non-aerodynamic things.
  - A willing person is aerodynamic; an unwilling one is not.
- When you pick up something lengthy and swing it to bash someone, you gain some safety in distance, and you roll one less die for Knockback. (Now you know why details of “uproot telephone pole” are in the things chart.)
- Some Growth and/or Density increase makes you an environmental object too.
- Getting Grabbed doesn’t have to be too bad, now that you can Grab back without needing to roll.
- A Perception roll can show you the structural details of a building or similar object, so that destroying one hex can set up a collapse.

To add to the above, “the ground (or whatever) hits back.” The damage equals the number of inches you would have traveled. Therefore a person thrown 6” will take no extra damage from landing, just the damage itself, but if he or she meets a girder along the way, that’s a 6d6 blow of its own.
• Unless you’re literally counting hexes, approximate in 3” bits (6 meters, or about twenty feet).
• The material in question can adjust the total of the additional damage, all the way down to no damage for landing in the shipment of creampuffs, or a couple of dice extra for solid steel or something similar.
• The intervening object takes damage equal to the Strength being used.
• To add to that strategic-Strength list, you can pound a prone opponent directly down into a solid surface.

Knockback presents a special case of impact and sort-of falling, sort-of throwing. If you are knocked back into something before finishing the Knockback distance, you take 1d6 damage per inch of distance you traveled, and so does the thing you hit. Acrobatics is the only recourse at that point.

For difficult and dangerous environments, use the powers list with abandon. If you fall into the wet concrete, it’s an Entangle; if you stick your head into the turbine at the power plant, it’s a No Normal Defense Damage Shield. Use 30 as the baseline Active Points for most effects of this kind, and if something seems to you to be worth more, describe it as especially ominous in some way.

The same principle applies to buildings and vehicles with various abilities, whether perception, defense, or attack. Simply put, treat them as characters, with Speed, relevant Characteristics at least as far as the powers are concerned, and similar. There’s no need to build them in too much detail, e.g., the whole thing is as big as it is without having to figure out Growth, and for anything besides the operation of their powers, they’re just objects.

Deep Dive

The problem with the detailed location map isn’t how much work it is, but rather the process of forcing the characters to be at that map, as a necessity of play. The “it’s right here, grab-and-go” methods allow for flexibility and player agency in arriving at confrontations, but also for allowing the immediate environment as much direct impact as possible. That ties into investigative and proactive play as well, as everyone involved is well served to determine the location of the confrontation, and conversely, to try to avoid confrontations at specific places.

Situations involving rapid, long-distance movement provide their own whole world of resolution. Ultimately, such events are either a fight or a race, so resolve them simply in exactly those terms, using the jargon of velocity, turn radius, altitude, and angle of intersection as special effects and descriptions of outcomes. Begin with comparisons of Active Points, so that who’s faster or more maneuverable is established, and to see if direct conflict is even relevant. If so, run clashes of Combat Value for attacks or attempts to force the other off-course.

Strong stuff

By itself, the magnitude of the Strength characteristic is only one part of a hero whose primary feature is being strong, not sufficient by itself.

The first consideration is Special Effects. For example, think of someone using the Block Maneuver against a punch that’s strong enough to shatter a concrete wall. Narration can shape the events across a wide range of sensible justifications for these specific characters that don’t cheapen the strength.
• “Block” can mean anything that obviates an opponent’s blow, at the cost of one’s next action. It could be a super-soft martial technique that redirects it without opposing the force directly, or draw upon the blocking character’s power, or anything like those, for the special effects.

• Use thought balloon free monologues just like the comics writers do, as Hail Mary saves for things that are dubious when drawn. For a very unlikely defense roll that nevertheless succeeds, “Whew! That would have squished my head! I don’t think I’ll pull that off again!”

• Fake damage is extremely useful: in the fiction, the character feels pain and is quite vocal about it, but there’s no mechanical effect. (You may be surprised at how many players are 100% satisfied with this and this only.)

If those strike you as too much like “selling it” in kayfabe fashion, feel free to harden the Special Effects of super-strong actions into game mechanics when they encounter a successful defense.

• State that ½ the Stun damage gets through; defenses apply
• Call for an Unluck roll (especially recommended against martial arts heroes, who so often seem to have some)
• Require an Endurance expenditure or even Push in order to defend
• Apply Knockback as if the strike had been successful

Second, the powers and other quantitative features are just sitting there waiting for creative builds.

• Higher characteristic scores under situational Limitations
  o More strength for all sorts of things: specific maneuvers or when accompanied by a Presence Attack
  o Extra Presence only during Recovery Phases
• Powers Limited to use only when spending Strength-based Endurance in specific ways
  o Naked Advantages, e.g. Armor-Piercing vs. objects, or No Normal Defense when squeezing
  o Ego Defense only when pushing Strength
• Reactive-only defenses that cost Endurance
  o Considerably reduced Knockback on a Dodge, or, conversely, Force Field which only works against Knockback damage
  o Missile Deflection or a Reactive Attack which is Usable for Others – body shielding is a big thing; it can even be an Area Effect – for extra craziness, add a limited-range Teleport that can only be used to facilitate this action
• Special Effects for Skill Levels tuned to high-Strength maneuvers
• Energy Blast modified by Damage Shield and 0 Endurance, only against blocks and related situations. There’s your “too strong to block me without consequences” right there.

Disadvantages are perfect context for customizing and enhancing super-strength as well, providing the Limitation-based conditions under which great strength or powers associated with strength may become available.

• You can’t unsee it. Berserk and Enrage beg for subsets of powers and characteristics that only apply under their influence or following recovery from them.
• Obviously Susceptibility, Vulnerability, Dependence damage a character, but there’s nothing like heaving up the otherwise impossibly-heavy object while you’re reeling from that very damage.
• Psychological Limitations are the perfect dramatic counterbalance for super-strength, concerning one’s opinion about its dangerous or conditional features.
This is why there’s no such thing as “the Brick.” Ten super-strong characters should each have his or her own interesting profile of Characteristics, Powers, and Limitations to enjoy how Strength is done in addition to how much Strength. They should be as different in build as any ten other characters, based on their precise concepts and special effects, how they characteristically fight, and how the powers are constructed to express those.

The way of fists and feet
Martial Arts is more than a skill that unlocks the listed Maneuvers and damage multiple. Those are only a little more effective on their own, at most aiming your attention at the same combat timing available to everyone. From there it’s a matter of forming your own combat strategy built from different possible angles.

- Given one’s Speed and maneuverability, you have to find your own version of “in and out”
- Using Presence as hesitation-augmenter
- Find Weakness allows for potentially Stunning blows, leading to a repeated strike
- Acrobatics adds defensive bonuses as long as you keep moving

The primary benefit of Martial Arts is getting to name a fighting style as a special effect, which permits dipping into the powers – in effect, “just fighting” but with a superhero’s worth of smackdown attached to your particular maneuvers-strategy.

- Energy Strike can be attached to any single attack maneuver – want your Throw to immobilize someone? That’s an Entangle. Choke hold? No problem, attach Energy Blast with No Normal Defense to the follow-up squeeze on a Grab, which requires no attack roll.
- Missile Defense, Usable for Others, At Range – which in a pinch can be used by canceling your next action.
- Force Field + substantial Reduced Knockback, or even Desolid Limited (action-canceling defense only), for that impossible evade – not even a hit hits, sometimes.

You should be dreaming up a Power Framework about right now, as well as the insight that “martial arts” isn’t a subsystem, but a lens to see the same rules everyone else is using in a combat-centric way. You’re fighting one Segment into the future and they’re always one step behind.

That’s why fights between martial artists may begin with the combatants staring oddly at each other. Find Weakness is the obvious formal action, but it’s also a Presence Attack, and a duel of held actions. If you can force a hesitation and get in with a held action at the right time, then you can follow up immediately on a thrown, grabbed, or knocked-back opponent.

Weapons operate primarily as special effects, permitting the conceptual justification for Area Effect attacks among other things. They can be lost, left behind, or taken away, differing from the Focus Limitation insofar as they might be, rather than will be.

---

Deep Dive

Since “powers” is nothing but a textual category, it’s quite all right to sound off about how human skill and determination are superior to positivized nucleons or whatever, while hammering someone with 55 Active Points of Energy Blast + Increased Knockback, or delivering a couple dice of Destructive Stun Drain.
There is no way to satisfy the urge to know “who can beat whom.” Dice are used for a reason – to ensure that all victories and defeats are provisional. The more you push a given confrontation toward “one of us is going down,” the more iffy it becomes regarding which of you it will be. Given any of the many appropriate Psychological Limitations, the classic contradiction between winning the fight vs. getting what you want kicks your hero in the face, and it’s wonderful.

Guns raise a tricky issue. On the one hand, they need to be threatening enough for heroes to take them seriously, but if that’s the case, then heroes would reasonably all pack a piece too. These rules don’t currently take sides on that issue which is why you’re not seeing anything about guns and “not for points” weaponry – playtesting is expected to teach us a lot about the best options.

**Going mental**

No textual power category is fictionally constraining, so mental or physical is not either-or as far as a character is concerned. It’s fine to include powers based on physical Combat Value in your stable of “psychic powers,” or vice versa, in an Elemental Control or any other way that’s unified by special effects.

No single Ego-based power provides mental and emotional mastery. To play like the real mental heavy-hitters in comics, you’ll have to combine two or more of them into single attacks.

Ego-based powers may be Pushed for extra effect, but since the Endurance cost is based on Active Cost, that’s 2 Endurance per extra point.

Ego Defense provides its listed defense against the total value of a mental attack, but also unlocks the Ego Maneuvers. If you have Ego Defense with no other mental powers, only Ego Evade is available.

- Ego Evade: defensive maneuver, no effect except +3 DECV; typically requires canceling one’s next Phase as per reactive defensive actions.
- Psychic Plane: +2 Q/+2 D ECV, considered a ½ Move maneuver although the character doesn’t physically go anywhere; no Phase actions are possible, no perception of anyone except other characters using mental abilities.
- Id Rush: +3 OECV, -3 DECV, attack maneuver, usable with any mental attack, +1d6 effect/5 points of Ego, must be Pushed, Ego roll to resist irrational action based on one or more Psychological Limitation regardless of value.
- Mind Bar: offensive maneuver, similar to Grab but more specific, locks down an attacking mental power if you have the same power and prevents it from being used. Maintaining the bar is a ½ Phase action but is not considered an attack.
  - A mind-barred person may accept the bar and use other powers instead, attempt to break free, or to return a Mind Bar of their own.
  - It is possible for two or more characters to be mind-barring one another.
- Mind Stab: offensive maneuver, may only be delivered through a Mind Bar. No attack roll necessary, does 1d6 Stun damage per 5 points of Ego, and costs Endurance.

Adding the Usable On/For Others Advantage to Ego Defense is a significant addition to play. If someone is already being affected by an Ego-based power, you can throw Ego Defense on them to reduce the effect. For a group blanket-protection effect, you’ll need Ranged and Area Effect too.

Illusions varies a lot in its applications depending on whether you go small, big, or deep. It requires maintenance by spending Endurance, but you can also reduce the effect, rolling for effect again with fewer dice, with no required new attack roll.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intelligence</th>
<th>Person or object</th>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1x</td>
<td>Static</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>One sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2x</td>
<td>Moving, talking</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>All senses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dramatic changes</td>
<td>Stun damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Subtle changes</td>
<td>Stun and Body damage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Small” illusions typically place some object or effect into someone’s perception long enough to confuse or distract them, especially coordinated with Presence Attacks. They can be subtle and dangerous given preparation, such as Detective Work concerning Psychological Disadvantages, but maintaining the illusion or convincing someone of its genuine physical presence isn’t the point.

“Big” illusions alter the target’s concept of their whole environment, or affect multiple targets with an Area Effect, or both. It’s easier to change the perceived environment a lot, i.e., “floating in grey mist,” “trapped in infernal flames,” than subtly, like “you notice that everyone around you is secretly a robot.” When the altered environment includes the absence of specific people in it, yourself for instance, then Darkness or Invisibility can ensure it if the illusions don’t make it to 3x effect.

Going “deep” involves altering the target’s feelings or beliefs about the situation, or to access their existing emotions or memories for the content of the illusions. These and similar effects require adding Telepathy. If the desired effect includes a specific directive, then you need Mind Control too.

The successful attack roll establishes that the target does not realize they’re being affected, as long as the effect is at least 1x Intelligence. Coming to that realization is hard: some external stimulus must be involved, whether it’s someone trying to convince you, or something that contradicts the illusion affects you dramatically, like being hit by something else or stepping off a cliff.

Mind Control is more limited than it looks. By itself, it can only enforce orders to act. For effects like “forget,” “believe,” you need to combine it with Telepathy at the appropriate level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Viable commands</th>
<th>Psychological Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1x Ego</td>
<td>What they are inclined to do anyway</td>
<td>Common, ordinary response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2x Ego</td>
<td>What they wouldn’t mind doing</td>
<td>Common, irrational response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3x Ego</td>
<td>What they’re normally against doing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4x Ego</td>
<td>What they’re violently opposed to doing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The effect is immediate and the target loses no time, taking his or her next action as scheduled on the Speed chart. However, Mind Control, by itself, isn’t Telepathy. You have to tell them what to do, which requires no special perception or action unless conditions are making communication tough for everyone, but as long as you’re using ordinary communication, everyone else will see/hear you do it.

Unless you give an order, the target is inactive or performs any common-sense activity to maintain his or her own position or safety. Speaking is a free action so there’s no reason to wait around.
The control stays on with no further Endurance cost, but commands past the first are -1 level in effect.

When acting under command, the target may perform any actions consistent with the commands may be performed, e.g., making tactical choices in combat when directed to fight. The character knows he or she is mind-controlled and may take free actions. Commands like “act normal” or “stay silent” can shut those down, or other Ego-based powers can strike deeper to enforce submission.

If someone is messing with your behavior and/or perceptions, and you don’t like it, you can try to resist and throw off the effect, which will shut it down entirely. The Ego-based power is acting as an insidious Entangle, with Body and Defense equal to the Body rolled on the effect dice. You can struggle against it by rolling 1d6 per 5 points of Ego, counting the Body exactly as Strength vs. Entangle, including “chipping away” at the Defense. This effort may be pushed, and Psychological Limitations which oppose the effects can be invoked for +1d6/5 points, which is a golden opportunity for flashbacks and content-laden monologues. Psychological Limitations that accord with the Ego-based power were already taken into account regarding the level of effect, so they don’t reinforce it or counteract it.

Scan also varies by specific concept and use. The default is to hunt for a single mind, seeking its physical location. The target must be known relatively familiarly to the searcher, in a given area, with the roll modified by the number of other minds that act as interference.

One can also search for a data-match based on knowledge gained somehow, e.g., Detective Work. This can be adjusted to profiling effects when you combine it with other powers or senses, e.g., look at a crowd visually, but scan for a match.

To find someone defined along the line of “the person planning to murder the mayor tonight,” Telepathy must be included. And to wrap the game applications around in a different direction, Mind Scan with or without a combined other Ego-based power is an excellent super-use of Detective Work, for those find-anyone-for-I-am-the-night types.

Telepathy is a catch-all for some very different goals of thought-based communication. The only thing they have in common is that contact may be maintained at any distance at 1 Endurance per Phase given a willing participant, otherwise with the initial Endurance expenditure per Phase.

The most benign form can be conceived as a two-way radio link, permitting characters to talk freely regardless of distance. It requires only 1x Intelligence effect. Additional people can be added with 1 more point of Endurance spent on maintenance if they are willing, and with attack rolls and appropriate Endurance expenditure if they are not.

- Adding perception of one another’s situations, or one to another depending on what the telepath wants, requires 2x Intelligence effect.
- Discovering or revealing the truth of one’s own experience between persons requires 3x Intelligence effect.

More hostile applications include finding something out or altering the target’s memories or personality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intelligence</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Side Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1x Intelligence</td>
<td>Read or send surface thoughts</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2x Intelligence</td>
<td>Read or send deep, hidden thoughts</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3x Intelligence</td>
<td>Read or alter memories</td>
<td>Alter the wording of relevant Psychological Limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4x Intelligence</td>
<td>Read or send into subconscious</td>
<td>Add a new Psychological Limitation equivalent to 15 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Psychological Limitations are always surface thoughts, as are all recent Presence Attacks (delivered or received).
- Secret Identity is a deeply hidden thought.

Content is a tricky thing – the attacking telepath can’t say “ah ha, you knew the secret code, even though you didn’t know you knew, and I just found it,” but on the other hand, you can’t say, “sorry, I suppressed that into my subconscious, you didn’t dig deep enough.” Treat thoughts effectively as solid objects and stay as simplistic as possible regarding “where they are,” without weaseling.

Implanting convictions doesn’t include directives unless Mind Control is included, and for specific memories to be altered, Illusions is required.

### Deep Dive

The “tonal” question about Ego-based powers is whether they’re an additional venue for glowing power-on-power combat, or a whole realm of insidious and disturbing conflict, probably compounded by the Invisible Special Effects advantage. The latter approach brings forward psychology, personality, motives, memories, reactions, trauma, and related matters.

Ego-based powers almost automatically interplay with Psychological Limitations, as indicated by some of the rules. A group may like to systematize these further by matching the parameters for Psychological Limitations to each level of each Ego-based power.

The further you go with such ideas, the more chance that players’ agency via their characters will be compromised. The best practice, whatever else is done, is to maintain full player authority over how the character feels about the Ego-based powers experience afterwards, and how the player feels about the character.

### As play goes on

This game swiftly develops its own, dynamic social ecology with its history and population of characters. Coming up with “what next” doesn’t need much beyond your shared engagement.

The nice thing is that both players and GM are empowered to take consequences seriously, in terms of what characters did and what happened. The setting can draw on anything you know about the real world, and anything fantastic you want to use to exaggerate it. The exercise of such power breeds conflict situations without limit, and tests the heroes without relent.

Players don’t need to be passive and wait for the next “scenario.” They can set quite a bit of the table as their characters do what the players say, to go here or to go there, to talk to this person or look for that thing, whether to resign from their government status, or to revise their entire relationship to society, or to take up residence on the Moon, or to change their names and outfits, or anything personal, like getting married or divorced or changing up anything else.

Their non-point features like money, social status, and general lifestyle are not small, and they can change up quite a bit based on what’s happened. That goes double for relationships of all kind,
growing, changing, and even breaking up, all setting up new circumstances, situations, and opportunities.

As for the GM, starting right away after the first session, build a cast list of every single character, depicted however you like, but in some way including the various institutions and organizations. Keep it around – open the notebook or file, scribble in there.

- Add characters who’ve appeared in play, and invent new ones who seem reasonable to include next time.
- Consider the opinions and responses of every character to whatever is going on: the latest developments in play, as well as real-world events and issues for this location.
- Do not hold steady: every character is up to something, ready to be active when considered during play.

The result? Surprise, for everyone. What turns out to happen in the session itself, during play itself, can’t be planned or controlled. How a given character responds to it will lead to drives and actions which, emerging right out of play as they do, cannot have been pre-programmed long before. “Plotting” becomes real, rather than canned.

Sometimes comics are fun because they don’t end, and sometimes because they do. The same goes for playing this game. Play can end, sure. If you drive it hard and honor what’s happened by making things change, you’ll find that no longer how short or long you play, it will end well.

*In the example game, every imaginable issue concerning modern policing, law enforcement, justice, the trial process, imprisonment, and the specific aspects of crime in Chicago are on tap for the circumstances of play. That includes our individual perceptions and judgments of them, which will constantly inform the content and events of our experience.*

*The Wild Side are not just going to “recur” intermittently and otherwise just sit around. They’re going to be doing things that matter to them, responding to things, deciding whether to change what they’re doing, and otherwise making themselves known. The same goes for all the other characters, powerful and marginal alike.*

*How are Miasma and her group going to get along, go along, kick butt (and on whom) and work it out?*

**Deep Dive**

Villains, adversaries, enemies, opponents, foes ... we’re overlooking that crucial source of adversity for superheroes: each other. Fights among heroes aren’t uncommon in comics. However, putting aside the over-used convention of misunderstandings, the really good conflicts among them aren’t physical combat, but clashes of values. Especially when their opposing views are understandable.

Superhero comics always reflect upon the world they were written and drawn in, and they cannot help but be relevant, at the very least showcasing things we really think and feel. The best practice is not to force it, but to seek authenticity in anything brought into play, to avoid the conventions in other media (including the comics), and to discover that feeling that whatever you may say about our comic, it is what it is because we are who we are.

**A bit of comics talk**
There was one decade of almost complete pure crazy freedom in mainstream superhero comics. In 1968 DC Comics was just brushing off the last lint of its beginnings in bootlegging and porn to become a shiny junior cog in the Warner Communications wheel. Due to several hassles I won’t go into here, something odd happened: instead of a company stooge or a spit-shined “Mafia? What Mafia?” goon being installed as the new editor in chief, it was Carmine Infantino – an artist. Think about that, an artist in charge! Are you surprised that Infantino instantly hired a bevy of very young artists and writers who had been dazzled by Lee, Kirby, and Ditko over at Marvel? And that they set to work drawing and writing things that prior DC authorities Otto Binder and Mort Weisinger would never have dreamed could be in superhero comics?

Speaking of Lee, Ditko, and Kirby, 1968 was the year when the two artists stopped working for Marvel and Lee stepped down his writing duties, soon turning over the chief editorship to Roy Thomas. Thomas, a former English teacher and generally thoughtful troublemaker, turned loose his own stable of new writers and soon artists. Also, the company had been sold to Perfect Film & Chemical Corporation, which resulted in even less supervisory control than over at DC, and it was finally released from a long-standing agreement with DC to limit its number of titles. Marvel therefore underwent a dizzying expansion of content and experimentation that blew the minds of the upcoming tween generation, including black-and-white magazines that didn’t mind such things as the Comics Code.

It was all connected. Somewhat under the table, many creators would work for both companies simultaneously, and everyone was also working at Warren Magazines (Creepy and Eerie), clandestinely scribbling in underground comix we dare not name, and trying their hand at the less successful but significant companies like Charleston, Atlas/Seagate, and Tower. And let’s not forget the times: this was during the second half of the Vietnam War, Watergate, SALT I, and hundreds of radical social changes world-wide, and every creator had an opinion. Everything about modern superheroes boiled up out of this incredible stew.

Corporate sanity prevailed eventually, but the damage and the wonder had been done: both companies’ content was irrevocably changed and impossibly, delightfully complicated.

What does any of that have to do with role-playing? Right at that moment, is when this hobby of ours was being born. The people who wrote the first superhero games (Superhero 2044, Villains & Vigilantes, Champions) were avidly reading exactly these comics, when the familiar characters deviated most drastically from their comfortable niches and could be seen doing anything, when new characters were created with almost total freedom, when stories were jumping off the pages with no mandated story-arc in place.

That’s why Champions Now seeks to recover play for your characters and your own implied comic that can stand on its own. Who are your superheroes and villains, and what does each of those terms even mean? What does your Now look like, and what happens in it?

People like Neal Adams, Gerry Conway, Steve Engleheart, Chris Claremont, Marv Wolfman, Walt Simonson, Steve Gerber, John Byrne, and Frank Miller found out, decades ago. Comics publishing slammed the door on it, fast. However, you have no corporate master to obey, no franchise to promote, no canned setting to conform to.

Champions Now says, open the door.

Acknowledgments & appreciation
The great credit belongs to the original authors of *Champions the Super Role-Playing Game*, George MacDonald and Steve Peterson, and also to contributors Bruce Harlick, Aaron Allston, and Michael A. Stackpole. All of us who worked on this project hope we have represented you well.

Ron also does a whoop-whoop fist circle with his buddy Steve S. Long!

This work is dedicated to the memory of K. C. Ryan and Michael O'Connell, including the legendary Forte game and the Amateur Press Alliance *The Clobberin’ Times*, but most especially their boundless imagination, enthusiasm, good will, and indomitable spirit.
Master Lists

Base Characteristics (all have base 10)
Strength 1/1 point
Dexterity 1/3 points
Constitution 1/2 points
Body 1/2 points

Derived Characteristics
Defense (CON/5), 1/2 points
Speed (1 + DEX/10), 0.1/1 point
Recovery (STR/5 + CON/5)

Skills
Acrobatics
• 10 points
• 9 + DEX/5

Climbing
• 5 points
• 9 + STR/5

Computer Programming
• 5 points
• 9 + INT/5

Detective Work
• 5 points
• 9 + INT/5

Disguise
• 5 points
• 9 + INT/5

Find Weakness
• 10 points
• Fixed roll 11-
• Halves opponent's defenses for a single type of attack

Skill Levels
• Universal +1/10 points
• Ranged Combat/Close Combat/Ego Combat +1/8 points
• All Perception +1/5 points
• Specific Maneuver, Skill roll, Power roll, specific Perception roll, Coordinated Attack roll, other Characteristic roll +1/3 points

Powers
Blast
• 1d6/5 points
• Decide whether it does Knockback (inches = Body - 2d6)
• Ranged
• See Ego-based Advantage for an important option

Clinging
• 20 Strength/10 points

Concealment
• Impairs ordinary sight or two other ordinary senses
• 1" radius/10 points
• Completely/+5 points
• All senses/+10 points

Danger Sense

Luck
• 1d6/5 points
• Maximum 3d6

Martial Arts
• Cost = Strength
• Unlocks Martial Maneuvers

Science
• 5 points
• 9 + INT/5

Security Systems
• 5 points
• 9 + INT/5

Stealth
• 5 points
• 9 + DEX/5

Swinging
• 5 points minimum
• 1" per point

Powers
Blast
• 11/-10 points
• No Endurance cost

Density Increase
• 1 unit/10 points
• 2x mass, +5 Strength, +5 Constitution, +1 Body

Desolidification
• 20 points
• All movement through solid substances, at normal rates
• One substance or condition is impenetrable
• Does not include protection from damage

Ego Defense
• +5/5 points
• Unlocks Ego Maneuvers

Enhanced Senses
• No Endurance cost
- Choose one: Vision, Hearing, Smell, Other
  - +1 Perception (required)/5 points
- Refine
  - Any broader spectrum +5 points
  - Focus (micro/macro) +5 points
  - Analysis +5 points
- Extension (any/all)
  - Through substances +10 points
  - 360 degrees +10 points
  - Track +5 points
  - Unusual range +10 points

**Entangle**
- 1d6/10 points
- Body rolled = Body and Defense of restraint
- Ranged

**Extra Limb**
- 1 limb/10 points
- No Endurance cost, except for ordinary Strength cost when applicable
- +1 Offensive Combat Value in hand-to-hand fighting per limb

**Faster-Than-Light Travel**
- 10 points
- No Endurance cost

**Flash**
- Affects one sense
- 1d6/10 points
- Body rolled = segments
- All senses/+10 points
- Ranged

**Flash Defense**
- 5 points
- No Endurance cost

**Flight**
- 1”/2 points
- 1 Endurance/5”

**Force Field**
- 1 Defense/2 point
- Hardened vs. Armor-Piercing

**Force Wall**
- 1 Defense/1 side of 1 hex/5 points
- Hardened vs. Armor-Piercing
- Ranged

**Gliding**
- 4”/5 points, 10 points minimum
- No Endurance cost

**Growth**
- 1 unit/10 points
- 2x mass, +5 Strength, +2 Body, +5 Presence, +1 Defense, -1” Knockback

**Illusions**
- 1d6/5 points
- Ranged

**Instant Change**
- 5 points

**Invisibility**
- To ordinary vision/20 points
- Universal/50 points

**Knockback Resistance**
- -2” Knockback/5 points

**Lack of Weakness**
- 5 points
- No Endurance cost

**Life Support**
- (cumulative) Under water 5 points / vs. gases breathed or absorbed +5 / vs. vacuum & high pressure +10 / nigh any environment +10
- (add-on) No biological functions 5 points
- No Endurance cost

**Mind Control**
- 1d6/5 points
- Ranged

**Missile Deflection**
- 20 points
- 9 + DEX/5
- May be used as a free action once between Phase Actions

**Power Defense**
- +5/5 points
- No Endurance Cost

**Power Drain**
- 1d6/10 points
- Cannot target a defensive power or defensive characteristic

**Power Transfer**
- 1d6/15 points
- Cannot target a defensive power or defensive characteristic

**Presence Defense**
- +10/5 points
- No Endurance cost

**Regeneration**
- During Recovery, +1 Body/10 points
- No Endurance cost

**Running**
- +1” ordinary movement/2 points
- 1 Endurance/5”

**Shrinking**
- 1 unit/10 points
- ½ size, 1/8 mass
- ½ range modifier, ½ perception roll above 1”, ½” Running, +3” Knockback

**Scan**
- 1d6/5 points

**Stretching**
- 1”/5 points

**Superleap**
- 2x distance/10 points

**Swimming**
- 1”/2 points
- 1 Endurance/5”

**Telekinesis**
- 1d6 STR/5 points
- Ranged

**Telepathy**
- 1d6/5 points
- Ranged

**Teleportation**
- 15”/30 points
• 2x mass/+5, memorized location /+5
• 1"/5 points

Tunnelling

Power Frameworks
Elemental Control
• The cost of the Elemental Control must be half the Active Cost of the smallest power in the Elemental Control
• Only powers that cost Endurance may be included
• The Active Cost of each power is discounted by the amount of the Elemental Control
• General Limitations are applied to the Elemental Control as well as to each power, after calculating the discount for the latter
• Specific Limitations are applied after calculating the discount In combination with any general Limitations

Multipower
• The Active Cost of each slot costs one-fifth the Active Cost of the Pool, regardless of the maximum points that may be shifted into that power
• The Active Cost of a slot power cannot exceed the Active Cost of the pool
• The pool and all slots may be modified with blanket Limitations

Variable Power Pool
• The pool’s cost cannot be modified
• The Active Cost of a power created from the pool cannot exceed the value of the pool
• The total Real Costs of the array of powers derived from the pool cannot exceed the value of the pool
• Altering the array of powers is a single action, but cannot occur during combat
  o A skill roll can alter the array during combat as a ¾ Phase action
  o The skill must be customized and named, and paid for with 5 points
  o It begins at 11-
• The control cost’s Active Cost is half the pool’s value, and it may be altered with these unique modifiers
  o Current array can only be changed with special circumstances: e.g., touching target, environmental circumstance, extra time and effort ½
  o New array of powers depends on circumstances (GM’s choice) 1
  o Any other Limitations that will apply to all powers from the pool (as determined by choice of Limitations)

Power Advantages
Affects Desolid ½
• There is no reversed “Desolid character affects solid target” advantage
• Does not affect Endurance cost

Area Effect
• Explosion or one-hex ¼
• Customized area 1 hex/10 points in attack 1

Armor Piercing 1
• Body damage ignores defenses (only hardened defense stops it)

Autofire ¼
• Delivers 10 shots
• (Difference between target & roll)/2 = number that hit
• Each shot requires Endurance; may be combined with No Endurance Cost

Damage Shield ½
• Attack power has No Range and is not used to strike (may be combined with Energy Strike)
• No roll to hit required; automatic vs. other’s grab or touch
• May be used with Grab
• Requires Endurance to be active

Destructive 1

• Damage or Drain/Transfer is unaffected by Recovery; recovered only via special effect (e.g. medical)
• Does not affect Endurance Cost

Ego-based Attack 1
• Converts attack based on Combat Value to Ego Combat Value
• Removes range modifiers
• Removes Body damage (to include Body damage, get the Lethal Advantage as well)
• Does not affect Endurance cost

Energy Strike
• Attaches an attack power to an Attack Maneuver
• Removes range if present
• Replaces Maneuver damage with power damage ¼
• Adds power damage to Maneuver damage +¼

Hardened Defense ¼
• Ignores the Armor-Piercing advantage
• May be bought for the Defense characteristic as well as any defensive power

Increased Knockback
• Removes dice rolled for knockback
• Roll 1d6 ¼
• Roll 0d6 ½
Invisible Effects 1
- Special Effects are not perceived through ordinary senses
- Does not affect Endurance cost

Lethal 1
- For attacks that do no Body damage (Entangle, Ego-Based Blast, Flash, Power Drain, Power Transfer)
- Include Body damage as indicated by the effect roll
- Does not affect Endurance Cost

No Endurance Cost 1
- There is no intermediate version for this advantage
- It may be used for part of a power or characteristic
- Does not affect Endurance cost

No Normal Defense 1
- Stun damage bypasses all defense
- Fully stopped by one named special effect or defensive power
- Does not affect Endurance cost

Persistent
- Effect is repeated on later Phases; if stopped, cannot be renewed
- Requires ½ Phase action, no additional Endurance cost ½
- Requires no action, no additional Endurance cost, terminated with single condition or roll 1

Reactive
- Converts an attack to a Defensive Maneuver
- The power may only be used as a Defensive Maneuver
- Provides no defense

Usable at Range ½
- Range: 5x Power Points in inches
- If targeted, -1 OCV/3"
- Does not affect Endurance cost

Usable on/for Others ½
- This may be used to others' harm or benefit depending on the power and the immediate use
- It may either replace or add to use by/for oneself depending on the concept
- Does not affect Endurance cost

Power Limitations
Activation
- Potentially won’t work (roll before using)
- 14/-½
- 11/-1
- 8/-2

Always On ½
- If the power costs Endurance, it must have No Endurance advantage

Burnout
- Potentially unavaiable (roll after using); 11-
- Mild: restored during Recovery ¼
- Serious: restored out of combat ½

Costs Endurance ½
- Based on Active Cost
- Power is inactivated without Endurance
- Cannot have Always On advantage

Focus, ¾ to 1
- Inobvious & Inaccessible ¾
- Inobvious& Accessible ½
- Obvious & Inaccessible ½

Increased Endurance 1
- Power costs double Endurance, minimum 5

Limited Power
- Condition for availability or unavailability
- Reduced effect ¾ or ½
- All or nothing ½ or 1
- Value = GM judgment

Linked ½
- Non-attack power or Characteristic only
- Usable only when another non-attack power is active; the other power must cost Endurance
- The Linked feature’s Active Cost cannot exceed that of the other power

No Range ½

Only in Hero ID ¼
- This is a specific case of Limited Power which is common enough to warrant its own name

Disadvantages
Dependence
- 3d6 Destructive damage from lack of a substance or environment
- Damage applies per round in combat
- Debilitating out of combat
- Type of substance/environment
  - Ordinary, -10 points
  - Uncommon/weird, -20 points

Dependent NPC, -5 to -25
- Competence
  - Competent/0 points
  - Normal/-5 points
  - Incompetent/-10 points
- Specific help/issue

Effect is repeated on later Phases; if stopped, cannot be renewed
- Requires ½ Phase action, no additional Endurance cost ½
- Requires no action, no additional Endurance cost, terminated with single condition or roll 1

 Provocation
- Unusual/weird, 0 points
- Common, -5 points

 Response
- 8/-0 points
- 11/-5 points
- 14/-10 points

 Recover
- 8/-10 points
- 11/-5 points
- 14/-0 points

Enrage, -5 to -20
- Provocation
  - Unusual/weird, 0 points
  - Common, -5 points

 Response
- 8/-0 points
- 11/-5 points
- 14/-10 points

 Recover
- 8/-10 points
- 11/-5 points
- 14/-0 points
Hunted, -5 to -30

- Who
  - Individual/0 points
  - Small group/-5 points
  - Organization/-10 points

- Resources
  - Ordinary / 0 points
  - Extensive/unusual /-5 points
  - Superpowers/-10 points

- Intentions
  - Manipulative/-5 points
  - Ruinous/-10 points

Physical Limitation, -10 to -20

- How often
  - In certain situations, -5 points
  - All or almost all the time, -10 points

- How severe
  - Significantly limiting, -5 points
  - Debilitating/negating, -10 points

Problematic Identity

- Public -10
- Secret -15

Psychological Limitation, -5 to -25

- Defined as an emotion and/or strongly-held position
- Provocation
  - Happens rarely, -5 points
  - Happens a lot, -15 points

- Response
  - Opinionated, 0 points
  - Irrational/intense, -5 points
  - Meltdown/collapse, -10 points

Side Effect

- Attack power effect on oneself; no Endurance cost; no defense
- State circumstances
  - Own action
  - Others’ action or condition
- Points = Active Cost

Susceptibility

- 3d6 Destructive damage from a harmless substance
- Substance type
  - Uncommon/weird, -10 points
  - Ordinary, -20 points

Unlucky, -5 to -15

- 1d6/ -5 points, maximum of 3d6

Unusual Looks, -5 to -15

- 8/-5 points
- 11/-10 points
- 14/-15 points

Vulnerability

- Double damage from an attack
- Attack type
  - Single specific, -15 points
  - Common, -25 points

## Physical objects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical objects</th>
<th>Defense</th>
<th>Body</th>
<th>Strength to lift</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Around the neighborhood</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire hydrant</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>No Defense to tear out of socket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamppost, telephone pole</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>No Defense to tear out of socket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete/asphalt road surface</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>To shatter or tear up about 1 hex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buildings and nearby objects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House wall</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Also roofs, doors, furniture, stairs, et cetera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick wall</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>About 1 hex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete wall</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>About 1 hex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire door</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Use same values to tear off/out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobby/industrial decor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>For underlying structure; furnishings are crap at Defense 2, Body 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big tree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Body 7 to uproot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Construction equipment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crane, backhoe, etc</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete chunk</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steel girder</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Things that go</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family car</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorcycle</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truck, bus</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorboat</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helicopter</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Not aerodynamic for throwing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jet fighter</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Aerodynamic for throwing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tank</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>½ Body to disable, not demolish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passenger jet</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Not too sure about aerodynamics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Masses of natural stuff**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dirt</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Weird science**

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heavy machinery</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People pod/tank</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>They shield these things pretty well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hovercraft</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Very generic four-seater; adjust for alien-ness