

CHAPTER 10
THIS IS THE WORLD WE LIVE IN



The default setting for superhero comics is easy: ours. Not only that, but ours as it goes along, adding fantastic elements to the past and present without much regard for logic or consistency. If the Egyptian gods were real for purposes of a cool hero or villain to appear, well then, they were. If alien warrior species from the Sirian system is real because it's fun to draw them invading, well then, they are. Contrary to any sense, such things have no effect on history that brought modern life into being; or, if they did, only to make it get into the state that we actually know. Nor, going forward, do they affect who gets elected president for the comic's nation of origin, nor anything particularly about life, culture, or the economy there, all of which simply follow along the course of real events.

Just as with newsstand and spinner-rack comics publishing, for every new issue or, rather, for every session of play, the Now is our Now. "Our" world can have anything in it as serves the fun of the super action, but it never diverges from "our" course of reality.

You might prefer a more logically consistent or more original setting if that's your thing. Sometimes it's mine too. As of this writing, my current Champions Now game is set in modern Istanbul, in the thick of shifting real-world alliances. We rely on real-world maps, the personal knowledge of the players, and news reports, treated as a wave-front of continuing setting input as we play week by week. But my next one is going to be set in a future Mars habitat, because as of this writing, the 165 designs submitted to NASA just became available online and beg for in-game use. In such situations, play must rely instead on prepared, invented information.

Either way, these are the tools that make a given location work for the action of play. But how does the setting work, mechanically? I pick up the tractor and throw it at him! How does this spaceship work? Does this blast of proton rays hurt?

THE THINGS THERE

Where you are, and how you got there, was discussed in Chapter 9: What's happening. Once you're there, it's time to get concrete, because specific locations' physicality is central to superhero comics.

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's there. Office corridor? Water cooler. Busy highway? Lampposts and, incidentally, cars. Military airport hangar? Oh goodness. "Is there a jet fighter here?" "Yes, why did you bother to ask?"

More is better, because the things scattered around the action get swept up in it. Why, they may be lifted, thrown, toppled, and shattered – and, if you are very lucky, they'll explode!

In the following lists, the Strength listed is for lifting the thing or toppling it. Throwing requires at least 1d6 higher, for range in hexes equal to the difference as the default. Double the distance for anything designed for throwing, and halve it for anything notably awkward, unbalanced, or jointed (including an unwilling person). Endurance is spent for both lifting and throwing, separately.

As a starting references, here are some things from around the neighborhood. The listed Defense and Body indicate demolishing them into shards and rubble. To pull off or uproot the ones that are attached or rooted, ignore Defense.

	Defense	Body	Strength to lift, if detached
Fire hydrant	8	5	3d6
Public mail box	6	5	3d6
Street sign	4	3	
Lamppost, telephone pole	5	8	4d6
Medium tree	5	8	5d6
Big tree	5	11	9d6

Some things aren't lifted or broken entirely, but in pieces. The listed Defense and Body in this case refers to about a hex. Additional hexes' values are the same, but a greater area must be affected in some way to apply more widely.

	Defense	Body	Strength to lift, if detached	Notes
House wall	4	3	n/a	Also roofs, doors, furniture, stairs, et cetera
Plate glass pane	1	1	n/a	
Reinforced glass	3	1		
Brick wall	5	3	n/a	
Concrete wall	6	5	n/a	
Rock wall or surface	5	13		
Concrete/asphalt road surface	6	5	n/a	To shatter or tear up about 1 hex
Metal fire door	7	5	4d6	Use same values to tear off/out
Safe door	10	9		
Vault door	16	9		
Lobby/industrial I	5	6	3d6	For underlying structure; furnishings are crap at Defense 2, Body 1

Sometimes a thing is too big to contemplate lifting or destroying. In addition to knocking holes in it or tearing things off, you may also consider toppling them – you don’t break every piece into rubble, but you ruin it as a structure. Doing this requires a little investigation, using an appropriate Awareness, Find Weakness; or preferably both. If you can damage the right piece, using the list above or corresponding values, then the thing’s structural integrity is compromised and you are now, congratulations, in the midst of the hazard you just made!

Certain things convert nicely into usable, throwable weapons once you’ve busted them up or torn them loose.

	Defense	Body	Strength to lift
Lumber/broken wood	3	4	2d6
Concrete chunk	6	5	3d6
Stone chunk	4	11	4d6
Steel girder	9	6	5d6

Preparing or improvising objects is best done by extrapolating from the other tables, but the following lists will work for solid, simple things, such as sheets, blocks, and shaped or cast fittings.

Substance	Defense	Mass	Body
Sheet metal	4	1.6 kg	1
Chain, heavy tube	5	6.4 kg	3
Metal beam or bar	6	25 kg	5
Armor plating	13	100 kg	7
Plastic castings	2	400 kg	9
Heavy fiberglass	4	1.6 metric ton	11
Plywood	3	6.4 metric tons	13
Heavy wood	5	25 metric tons	15

For masses of natural stuff, the listed values apply per hex, if you’re trying to destroy or break through it. If you’re buried in them, use the Hazard rules.

	Defense	Body
Dirt	0	16
Rock	5	12
Snow	8	6
Ice	6	10

Motor-driven equipment or vehicles include the complication of being disabled rather than demolished into scraps, when they receive half the listed Body damage; for delicate machinery or electronics, just 1 Body past the Defense value will do it.

What happens to multi-part objects depends on the details of what happened, e.g., you ripped the hull right off the boat, but the radio in the cabin is fine. Also, some are dangerous when they're compromised badly enough and convert into hazards when they or their relevant piece is broken.

Gas-powered motor vehicles include fuel tanks, which may explode into a notable hazard if compromised. Real-world observation tells us this does not happen in any way similar to cinema, and since there is no freaking way to write a compromise rule that makes everyone happy, I leave the triggering circumstances and dice rolls for that up to you.

	Defense	Body	Strength to lift
Family or police car	4	9	6d6
Motorcycle, mini	4	5	4d6
SWAT or military transport	7	10	7d6
One-man tractor	5	6	5d6
Truck, full-size bus	4	10	7d6
Forklift	5	7	7d6
Crane, backhoe	5	9	9d6
Motorboat	3	8	5d6
Helicopter	3	9	7d6
Jet fighter	4	11	9d6
Tank	10	14	11d6
Passenger jet	4	15	13d6

Industrial machinery is similar but more durable. These values are for single-operator size, one or two hexes. For bigger, factory versions, use the same Body and Defense values, just increase the area and the required Strength.

	Defense	Body	Strength to lift	Notes
Light	5	4	2d6	Lawn mower, outboard motor
Medium	7	6	3d6	Pool/pond pump, bandsaw apparatus
Heavy	8	9	4d6	Small cement mixer, hydraulic car lift

And would we be without alien, future, other-dimensional, and magical devices? Not in the right comics, that's where! As with motor-driven devices, they're disabled at half Body. For reasons best known to the alien engineers, they also turn into hazards when they take any Body damage.

	Defense	Body	Strength to lift	Notes
Precision energy processor, portal	5	3	3d6	"Don't touch that, earthling!"
Control console	4	4	4d6	"Or that!"
Cthonic machinery	8	8	6d6	This thing is probably producing a hazard field already
People pod/tank	7	3	4d6	They shield these things pretty well
Hovercraft	5	9	9d6	Generic four-seater; adjust for alien-ness

PEOPLE

Character Points address the diversity and capabilities of super-powered heros and villains. They are not fine-grained enough for the diversity among other characters. Therefore all the system mechanics for regular people are the same, or nearly so.

- Strength 2d6
- Presence 2d6
- Speed 1, Body 10
- Defense 0 (that's really zero, not a typo)
- Dexterity 11, Intelligence 11, Ego 11

Outside of super-powered stressful situations, these people's differences are played as special effects. Their skills, wealth, social position, attractiveness, power, ordinary opinions, relationships, and all related matters are considered as bad or good as makes sense for each individual. That especially applies to their lifestyle and professional competence in the ordinary course of events, which may be quite excellent and are not resolved with dice.

Continuing, interactive people, or supporting cast, may seem to you to require a bit more. It's best to do so after their actual interest and importance is established or confirmed in play, rather than front-loaded in their original

appearance. If so, and if you think some person's competence is notable in non-ordinary circumstances, these parameters are sufficient, and usually not more than one or two of them.

- ▶ 1-2 more Intelligence or Ego
- ▶ One Skill
- ▶ 1-3 more d6 of Presence

You may assign Situations to them as seem applicable, since these mechanics often add power to play. However, they have no quantitative effect, i.e., they do not “buy” Points for other things.

The point values of the game start at 200 and grade up from there; everyone else is not rated in Points and should not even be considered “below” 200. It may seem to you as if this ignores a whole category of “trained agent” or “soldier” or “alien warrior,” but this is not the case – when such individuals or groups swing into action, ignore the concept of individual builds and use the Hazard rules as you see fit for the danger and capabilities they represent.

The people who are explicit or implied in Dependent Non-Player Character and Hunted Situations are built exactly as described above with these exceptions:

- ▶ Dependent NPCs definitely have Situations, whose total Points are calculated into the hero's build.
- ▶ If a Hunted is defined as super-powered, the relevant characters are fully built as villains.
- ▶ No one explicit or implied in either of these Situations may be affected by that hero's Presence.

HAZARDS

Heroes are often confronted by big-ticket situational hazards, including familiar crises like buildings on fire, natural disasters, technological catastrophes, or weird conditions like dimensional rifts or magical vortices. Inimical environments count too, including straightforwardly dangerous situations like an active construction site, or more deadly surroundings like ordinary water or vacuum. Extreme situations concerning crowds of people also qualify, when they are too diffuse or dispersed to be addressed as a group, and too many to fight in the hope of stopping anything. Devices or weapons which guard or attack may qualify, insofar as they make an extensive area dangerous and can't be targeted as objects. (1)

These hazards can't be fought in the sense of combat; the question concerns surviving them, passing through or escaping them, and perhaps stopping them. Combat-specific hazards, which is to say, foes and devices you can hit, are discussed in Chapter 11: Fighting Words.

Hazards can be the main problem or situation the heroes face, even prepared much as one prepares a villain. However, superhero action is rife with emergent hazards, so applying the rules on the fly is a basic game mastering requirement.

Hazards vary according to concept:

- ▶ What region is affected
- ▶ How the danger affects the region in terms of motion: whether it simply persists in that spot, or sweeps over it while going somewhere else, or spreads, or whatever
- ▶ Whether the danger is time-limited in any way, ranging from over in an instant to eternally present; for anything that lasts more than a single Phase, it has an effective Speed 2.
- ▶ Whether the source of the hazard is breakable, and if so, it has Defense and Body as the materials warrant.

A hazard's damage or effects are built as one or more Powers, using 60 Active Points, with an appropriate Area Effect that doesn't affect its Point total. It doesn't attack; the effects always work on whoever's in the affected area. 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 Lethal Aura; I could go on all day and you can too, once you get the hang of it.

A hazard's effect encounters defenses. It is quantitatively reduced by whatever Powers or Characteristics apply through the ordinary use of the rules, and it is also countered absolutely by some specific defense or some action, the latter typically requiring a dice roll.

Finally, a hazard includes some way to solve it. Sometimes that means nullifying the hazard entirely, putting a stop to it, and sometimes the best you can do is escape, pass through, or get enough time to accomplish something. In addition to whatever is listed, obvious special effects apply and people may also hit upon some other way that makes perfect sense, which is all right too.

Hazard	Effects	Defense	How to stop or traverse
Collapsing structure	5d6 Piercing Blast/4d6 Entangle	Force Wall	Force Wall
Interior of a burning building	3d6 Flash/3d6 Severe Persistent Blast	Life Support (gases)	Acrobatics/Telekinesis
Submerged in water	8d6 Lethal Entangle	Life Support (water)	Swimming
Submerged in mud	5d6 Lethal Blast/6d6 Entangle	Life Support (water)	Swimming Desolid
Compromised power plant	6d6 Severe Blast	Force Field	Computer Programming
Superheated steam	4d6 Severe Piercing Blast/4d6	Flash	Life Support (extreme environment) Force Wall
Blast furnace	9d6 Severe Piercing Blast	Life Support (extreme environment)	Force Wall
Molten metal	6d6 Severe Piercing Blast/3d6 Entangle	Life Support (extreme environment)	Force Field
Radiation leak	3d6 Severe Persistent Blast	Life Support (radiation)	Computer Programming/ Security Systems
Caustic or corrosive chemicals	3d6 Piercing Persistent Blast	Life Support (extreme environments)	Desolid
Explosive decompression	4d6 High Impact Blast/3d6 Severe Blast	Density Increase	Movement power 10 hexes per hex
Rocks fall	12d6 Blast followed by 6d6 Entangle	Missile Deflection	Desolid/ Telekinesis
Panicked, dispersed, dangerous crowd	4d6 Entangle/2d6 Flash	Stealth/Climbing/ Desolid	Flight/Acrobatics/Desolid
Explosion: dynamite	8d6 Explosion High Impact Blast	Density Increase or Special Defense: Knockback	Force Wall
Explosion: C-4	6d6 Explosion High Impact Blast/4d6 Piercing Blast	Density Increase or Special Defense: Knockback	Security Systems
Explosion: petroleum-based fuel	4d6 Severe Piercing Blast/4d6 Flash	Resistant Defense	High Impact Blast
Lightning bolt	6d6 Severe Destructive Blast	Force Field	Force Wall
High-tension electrical line or wire	9d6 Blast Aura	Force Field	Security Systems
Drifting rifts in time and space	Teleport Expanded Scope	Mental Discipline	Awareness Expanded Scope
Swarming tormented spirits	5d6 Flash/6d6 Images	Special Defense: Ego	Ego roll

Some hazards' damage is a little more complicated.

- Cumulative effects: if the damage is Persistent, and you stay (or are trapped) in the affected area, then new attacks come in on top of it, so you might be taking multiple strikes of the same attack, each one persisting.
- Secondary and often nastier attacks are activated by the first getting through, e.g., Flash following Blast, for instance, if you get a face full of chemical spray.

Some attacks don't damage you but just lock you down, with Force Wall, Entangle, or both. However, one of these might then be followed with secondary damage, or an Entangle might itself be Lethal.

Some hazards are engineered specifically against heroes, in a guardian or programmed situation, or even a specially-designed trap, with Powers that operate directly against their limitations. However, these work best as part of an adversary's intelligent goal. The stereotypical "deathtrap" was a cliché before I was born and has persisted in comics mainly as a self-referential joke. These rules allow you to build one if you want to. (2)

Some locations offer a more subtle hazard, in that they aren't exploding or trying to burn or dissolve or suffocate anyone, but they are more difficult to move in, offering more casual risk.

Hazard	Effects	Defense
Weird broken surfaces and scary angles	Movement of all kinds reduced to 3 hexes per Phase	Clinging operates normally (no roll required)/Acrobatics or situational/Awareness permit Dexterity roll per Phase to move normally
Unstable or fragile surfaces	Landing at speed from Flight or a variant results in 6d6 Entangle	Acrobatics permits Dexterity roll
Unpredictable jets or gouts of dangerous stuff	6d6 Severe High Impact Blast	Acrobatics
Slippery surfaces	8d6 High Impact for purposes of Knockback, as the first stage of falling damage	Superleap

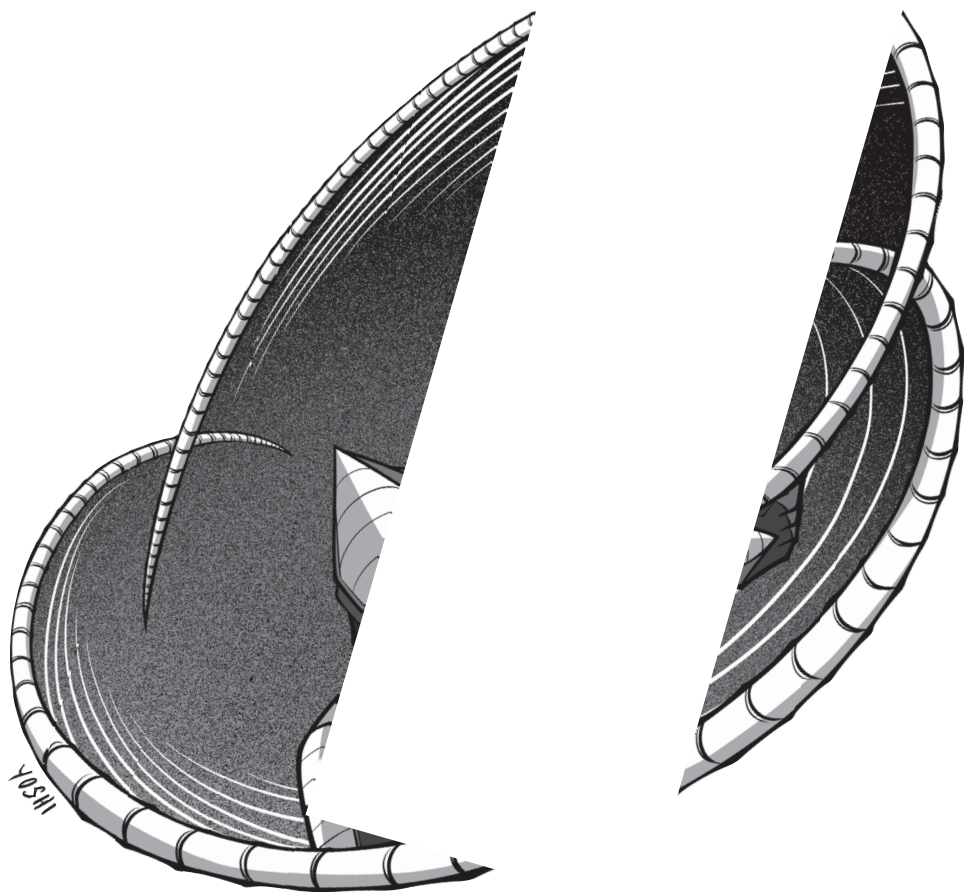
Hazards may emerge in the moment, such as the impact from or between vehicles. In this situation, each vehicle involved is treated as a Move attack.

- Move By: base damage is $\frac{1}{2}$ Body of the item in d6, plus the velocity in hexes divided by 5 in d6
- Move Through: base damage is the Body of the item in d6, plus the velocity in hexes divided by 2 in d6

The vehicle takes the damage itself as well as delivering it; which, as you can imagine, turns a head-on collision into a Grade A disaster!

Heroes have been known to match their might against a careening vehicle. The safest way is to pull backwards on it, in which case Strength and velocity may be matched in terms of rolling Body for a relatively easy resolution. However, if you jump in front of it for direct impact vs. might confrontation, then roll the Strength exerted by the hero against the damage delivered by the vehicle. If the Strength delivers equal or greater Body, then the vehicle is stopped. The hero still takes the damage, and the player decide whether the vehicle does or doesn't, treating the hero's roll as another vehicle's head-on impact.

People inside a colliding vehicle have no such option and take damage upon impact, as a Blast with d6 equal to the Body damage that penetrates the vehicle's defenses. However, the details of a given vehicle and a given situation may require customizing a more complex hazard on the spot.



Falling is one of the great emergent hazards, and not even a flying hero is immune to it, if he or she is Stunned while aloft, for example.

Segment	Velocity (hexes per segment)	Distance fallen in hexes
1	5	5
2	10	15
3	15	30
4	20	50
5	25	75
6	30	105
Thereafter	30	+30 per Segment

Specially-dense or heavy things or people fall faster, at +1 hex per level of Density Increase, i.e., doubled weight, to a maximum of 30 hexes per segment, or terminal velocity.

Impact hits with 1d6 per hexes of velocity, making that “terminal” all too literal. To avoid it one may counter the falling velocity with a movement Power, like Flight obviously, but also Superleap in the riskier context of actually landing. In either case, the hexes of movement are subtracted from falling velocity: if they exceed the velocity, then the fall is broken and the hero is now moving under his or her own Power; if they do not, then the velocity is slowed by the difference and can be maintained at that value as long as the movement Power is feasibly still employed against it, as the hero continues to fall.

In the lucky event that the location offers some projections on the way down, the hero may grab at them to arrest the fall, with a Dexterity roll. If it succeeds, then the Defense + Body of whatever it is subtract from the velocity in hexes. As objects go, repeat offenders include flagpoles (Defense 2, Body 4), awnings (Defense 3, Body 1), and branches (Defense 3, Body 4).

If that's enough to bring it to zero, then the hero is hanging there from the thing. The thing also receives damage as 1d6 per hex of arrested velocity, which may break it – therefore, if the velocity exactly equals that value, the fall is stopped, but the thing breaks. More elegantly, a hero with Acrobatics may attempt a Dexterity roll to use such a projection to move to a controlled landing.

Trying to save a person by catching them at the point of impact is ridiculous; but that doesn't stop it from happening in the comics! It's a feat of both Dexterity and Strength, rolling the former to make the maneuver in the first place, and the latter to match against the velocity of the fall. If the Body rolled by Strength equals or exceeds the Body of the velocity dice, then all is well; if it doesn't, then the damage of the difference applies to falling and catching persons alike.

COOL DIGS AND HOT WHEELS

No matter how expensive or high-tech, most places and vehicles aren't rated or built in Points. Roughly speaking, the things that fit well into the "person" corner for each hero may be considered part of their lives, whether owned by them or part of their jobs or anything similar. If the hero's lifestyle or circumstances change dramatically, then the places associated with them shift accordingly, again, without Points involved.

You may, however, turn Points to the purpose of enhancing or inventing locations and vehicles, making them part of a hero's sheet just like anything else on it is. In terms of the three corners, this is the only way you can associate locations and vehicles with your hero identity and actions, as opposed to the person corner, and they may certainly surpass realistic limitations in terms of tech, coolness, and capacity.

- Heroes use their Points from their total amount.
- Villains begin play with a grant of 5-40 Points.

Cool as it may be to have such a place or vehicle of one's own, it's downright awesome to have one that's built across more than one sheet, with two or more heroes contributing Points. Such things may amass considerable emotional investment and development in their features, and go very far to establish and maintain a distinctive group identity.

For 5 points, you may designate a place or vehicle the hero would reasonably have due to his or her person corner or establish a new one at about the same size, approximate value, and general features. These Points effectively make the item permanent, in fictional terms. If it's damaged or even destroyed, you can get it back or get something equivalent as soon as conceivable. They also count toward the Powers and other features described below.

Its Point total may be increased with Situations, which apply in play to any and all heroes who make use of the thing, not just the ones who provided the Points.

Situation	Points	Details
Public Identity	10	It is the topic of ongoing government, media, and cultural attention, including visits which bypass concealment or secrecy
Unluck 1-3d6	5 per d6	Unlike the hero version of the Situation, this is due to a specific feature or ongoing circumstance

No other Situations may contribute to its Points. Even if a supporting cast person lives at the location or invented the vehicle, he or she is not a Dependent Non-Player Character for it, nor does a villain or organization who wants to destroy or control the base count as a Hunted. If you want individuals with these roles or goals in play, then they are either included as part of Unluck's definition or they belong in a hero's Situations.

You can put more Points into it, and very probably should.

All Powers and Advantages are eligible. They require no Point-based staffing or maintenance, and they have no formal Endurance or Limitations, however, they are subject to aggressive interpretations of their limitations, requirements, vulnerabilities, and energy requirements as special effects.

The following may remind you of some well-known examples from the comics.

Feature	Powers	Variants
Hidden	Concealment, Invisibility	Hard to locate it within an obscured region/Some part or area inside it is obscured
Surveillance	Awareness	Of things inside it, Situational/Of the surroundings, Expanded Scope for the region/Of further targets, increased Expanded Scope
Hardening	Force Wall	Durability for structures Barrier to prevent access
Specialized protection	Special Defense, Life Support	For itself, vs. exterior and interior attacks/For persons within it, vs. exterior attacks
Strange interior	Flash (orientation)	Teleport vs. others (disrupts movement)/Random/Controlled or directed
Mobility	Flight, Teleport, Swimming; Expanded Scope	Getting to it and back from it/ Traveling around in it
Weaponized	Any attack	On contact (Aura)/Ranged/ Specialized for impact (Strike)

Living and working spaces are common features, either for a base as a literal home or a vehicle as group transport.

Feature	Rules	Points
People's space	Living quarters for everyone who contributed Points; includes sanitary, sleeping, and dining	5
	Passenger accommodations for everyone who contributed Points	5
	Common or dormitory-style quarters; includes common dining and sanitary	5
	Offices and specialized professional space	5
	Public space for reception, interaction, events	5

For facilities, the listed Points establish the space and basic functions. For them to do anything special, you'll also need some Powers.

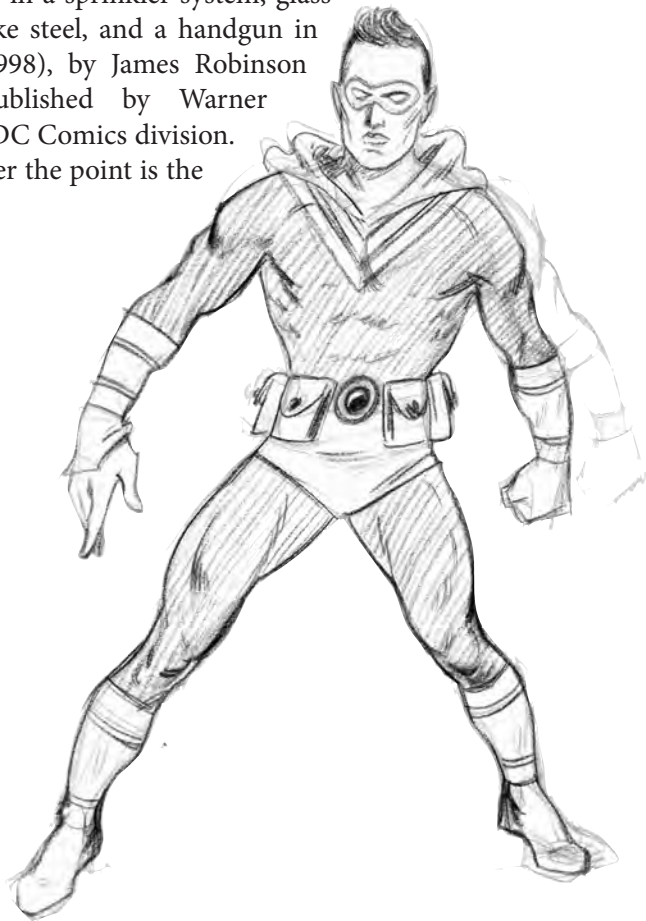
Functions	Variants	Points
Exercise and training	Strength, flexibility, fighting practice	5
	"Danger rooms" for practice vs. automated, responsive attacks	10
Medical	5	
Security	Information	5
	Physical protection	5
Labs		5
Libraries or databanks		5
Recreation		5
Imprisonment	per unit	5

These features require maintenance personnel unless the Autonomous feature is included.

REFERENCES

(1) Dimensions may certainly be a hazard unto themselves, especially for stranding people. Kryptonians have long punished criminals, and occasionally Superman, by banishing them to the Phantom Zone, where they can drift ghost-like and observe, but cannot interact with, our universe. (Fortunately, it's not very secure!) Similarly, the Negative Zone is so alien and forbidding that Tony Stark at one point builds a prison for wayward superheroes there. The former first appeared in *Adventure Comics* #283 (1961) by Robert Bernstein and George Papp, published by National Comics using its Superman DC imprint. The latter first appeared in *Fantastic Four* #51 (1966), by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, published by Magazine Management using its Marvel Comics imprint.

(2) Sometimes the deathtrap joke is more funny than others. The third Mist, a particularly deadly and disturbed foe of Starman, managed to kill the second Amazing Man, Crimson Fox, and Blue Devil using a series of cleverly fatal traps that included holy water in a sprinkler system, glass walls painted to look like steel, and a handgun in *Starman Vol. 2* #38 (1998), by James Robinson and Dusty Abell, published by Warner Communications in its DC Comics division. It's good to know whether the point is the "death" or the "trap."



CHAPTER 11 FIGHTING WORDS



These rules and their outcomes are to be used with verve, toward the decisive finishing of fights. And let the results fall where they may! If everyone plays their heroes as best they might, and you'll find that these points of decision and thought pay off. Abandon the habit of softening blows or handing over victories. Don't manage "where the story goes." That pernicious nonsense has no place here.

ORDERING

This chapter is about the fight once you really know you're in it. It is unequivocally in progress, after whatever single-action moments which may have signaled its onset. It's on – and it's going on.

The sequencing unit is called a segment, and we consider six of them at a time. You refer to a segment by number as if it were a location, as in, "on 2," "on 5," et cetera.

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:

	Segment	1	2	3	4	5	6
Speed	6	*	*	*	*	*	*
	5	*	*		*	*	*
	4	*		*		*	*
	3		*		*		*
	2			*		*	
	1				*		

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

Within a Phase, actions proceed based on Dexterity or Ego, depending on what the character happens to be doing. 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 relevant score (Dexterity or Ego) to lowest. Then we all go to Segment 4 to see who's got a Phase there.

For tied Dexterity and Ego values among heroes, the players decide who goes first. When villains or other NPCs are tied, they go in the order the game master decides. When villains and heroes are tied, villains go first.

Obviously, you need to know how much you can do on your Phase, which is one and only one of these:

- ▶ Stay where you are and do any full-Phase action
- ▶ Stay where you are and do any half-Phase or full-Phase action
- ▶ If the first half-Phase action isn't an attack, you can do another one, attack or otherwise
- ▶ If it's an attack, you're done
- ▶ Move over half your movement allowance (a full move, up to your maximum)
- ▶ 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
- ▶ Do a 0-Phase action, timed in the Phase according to the particular type; you can do more than one, but only one of each type
- ▶ Any Free actions you like; these are liberated from the Speed Chart and may be thrown in during your Phase or during anyone else's, whenever you want

Full-Phase Actions

- ▶ Full Move (any distance from half Move to full)
- ▶ Move-By or Move-Through (any distance up to full Move)
- ▶ Fully defensive avoidance: Dodge, Martial Dodge
- ▶ Recover from being Stunned
- ▶ Voluntary Recovery (no Phase actions permitted; free actions are permitted)
- ▶ Use most skills; exceptions are indicated below

Half-Phase Actions

- ▶ ½ Move (any distance up to half Move)
- ▶ Basic Maneuvers: Punch, Kick, Grab
- ▶ Break free (Strength or Ego)
- ▶ Martial Maneuvers: Martial Punch, Martial Kick, Throw, Martial Block
- ▶ Actively seek something with a perception roll
- ▶ Shifting slots within a Multiform, only at the beginning of a Phase
- ▶ Shifting the Variable Power Pool array using a Control Skill, only at the beginning of a Phase

0 Phase Actions

- ▶ Turning a power on or off, at any point during a Phase
- ▶ Using the Climbing or Acrobatics skill to move, or the Stealth skill with any other actions
- ▶ Pushing a power or characteristic as an add-on to an action, during its use
- ▶ Making an Ego roll associated with an action, e.g., pushing extra, during its use
- ▶ Sensing something without trying, as called for by circumstances, only at the beginning of a Phase

Free actions

- ▶ Speaking (“Monologue”)
- ▶ Presence Attack
- ▶ Missile Deflection

REACTIVITY

You're not supposed to wait obediently for your formal go-moments in the Speed Chart. Doing that creates a potential stop-motion, freeze-frame effect which isn't really what the system's for. It's more dynamic if you use the Chart merely as a chassis for anticipatory and reactive options.

You can **hold actions**, meaning, not acting when your designated moment arrives. To hold, you must state what you anticipate doing, to give everyone an idea of what your hero is looking at and how they're acting, although you're not entirely locked into whatever you say and can shift to doing something else instead. 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.

You can hold until later within the same 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. If your pre-emption is an attack, you must succeed with either a Dexterity roll or Ego roll in order to get in first. You may also hold past the end of the Phase, which isn't really all that different. If your actual next Phase arrives, however, then the hold ends and the potential action is lost.

Holding actions is necessary for two of the most important team-tactics in the system, assisting and coordinating attacks.

Reactive actions concern being attacked. Your hero is not standing there like a post on a target range, so his or her relevant characteristic is already factored into the standard attack roll. A few specialized maneuvers and powers allow for rolls in response to an attack, including Martial Block and Missile Deflection.

You also have the more drastic option to cancel your next entire Phase's worth of action to defend better than you currently would be able. You may perform a defensive combat maneuver (Dodge, Martial Dodge, Martial Block, Martial Throw, Missile Deflection, or an attack power with the Reactive Advantage) or turn on a defensive power (Force Field, Force Wall, Desolid, Shrinking, or a similar power). In doing so, you can move up to two hexes, getting the bonus from Acrobatics if you have it, but you can't use a movement power.

If it's during one of your Phases before your place in "line" has arrived, then you lose the Phase you're in. If it's after your action during a Phase, or during a segment that isn't your Phase, then the following Phase you'd act in, whatever it might be, is lost.

POSITIONING

Super-combat is pure choreography, and knowing who's where, whether they're in motion and how much, can be an art of its own.

The rules terms imply using a hex map for most situations of play, in which a hex represents two meters of fictional space. However, in practice you don't need an actual physical sheet with hexes marked on it. The listed distances are approximate and intuitive: a hex is "personal space," a sphere just a bit taller than a person, or a bit more than full arms-width, which is the same thing. For movement within this space, by default a hero has 6 hexes of Running, 2 hexes of Jump, and 2 hexes of Swimming; but most will obviously have more extensive capabilities based on characteristics and powers.

As mentioned above, the Speed Chart does not represent a metronome for fixed-in-fiction time. If it did, then continuous movement from Phase to Phase would become quite strange, e.g., is the character moving while he or she cannot otherwise "go?" If not, what does that even look like?

Instead, these mechanics embrace comics-panel logic and treat 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. Whatever time-slash-physics wiggle you may need goes into those and thus doesn't bother our heads. That's been perfectly functional throughout the history of comics, and it's functional here.

You'll need to attend to high-momentum moves sometimes, e.g. shaving off a hex of movement for turning corners during maximum Flight or Running, or slight time-lapses for especially far Superleap and Knockback so that they finish

at the end of a Phase. Flight may also see some adjustment based on its three dimensions, as it hardly ever goes completely flat or completely vertical.

The listed hexes-traveled for a power doesn't describe actual distance-over-time outside the scale of one Phase, so traditional speedometer descriptions of velocity usually aren't relevant. However, when they are, e.g., you're trying to catch or get ahead of a vehicle in motion, Speed must be factored in.

Speed						
hexes	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	6 kph	12 kph	18 kph	24 kph	30 kph	36 kph
10	12 kph	24 kph	36 kph	48 kph	60 kph	72 kph
15	18 kph	36 kph	54 kph	72 kph	90 kph	108 kph
20	24 kph	48 kph	72 kph	96 kph	120 kph	144 kph
25	30 kph	60 kph	90 kph	120 kph	150 kph	180 kph
30	36 kph	72 kph	108 kph	144 kph	180 kph	216 kph

Or in U.S./UK units,

Speed						
hexes	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	3.75 mph	7.5 mph	11.25 mph	15 mph	18.75 mph	22.5 mph
10	7.5 mph	15 mph	22.5 mph	30 mph	37.5 mph	45 mph
15	11.25 mph	22.5 mph	33.75 mph	45 mph	56.25 mph	67.5 mph
20	15 mph	30 mph	45 mph	60 mph	75 mph	90 mph
25	18.75 mph	37.5 mph	56.25 mph	75 mph	93.75 mph	112.5 mph
30	22.5 mph	45 mph	67.5 mph	90 mph	112.5 mph	135 mph

However, movement velocity is much, much different outside of combat and these values don't apply.

ORIENTING

In a combat situation, everyone's understanding of the physical situation should be interpreted generously by default, to the unrealistic degree of a bird's-eye view. A given hero will know where everyone in their perceptual field is, what they can and can't attack, who might be targeting them, and they won't get disoriented about who's moving which way or doing what.

However, if the location is confusing or has features that don't allow analogizing, the default switches, so that a given hero is disoriented about directions and uncertain about what everyone else is doing. It's treated as a hazard specific to them, applying the power Concealment, customized as needed for the situational details.

To orient oneself, whether about the location or regarding an opponent, a hero makes a perception roll, using Intelligence. A different “however” occurs when someone gets sneaky, using some combination of Stealth, Security Systems, Climbing, Invisibility, Concealment, and movement Powers that may apply, varying in who is and isn’t deceived. Chapter 12: Dynamic Mechanics provides the nuances.

HITTING AND NOT HITTING

Roll 3d6 to target anyone or anything successfully, comparing a characteristic of the attacker to that of the defender to arrive at the right target number.

The characteristic is Dexterity for physical attacks and by Ego for ego-based attacks; in this context, the one you use is called the Combat Value (sometimes abbreviated to CV). To hit someone, add your Combat Value to 11, subtract theirs of the same type, and that’s the target number for rolling 3d6. Equal to that value or below hits.

Example: Grimfire punches Killer Coil. His Dexterity is 12 and hers is 13. $11 + 12 - 13 = 10$, so the player must roll 10 or less on 3d6 to hit.

Example: Anybug uses his Stink Bug Spray on Domain. His Dexterity is 14 and Domain’s is 11. $11 + 14 - 11 = 14$, so the player must roll 14 or less on 3d6 to hit.

Example: Domain uses Hegemony (Mind Control) on The Which. Domain’s Ego is 14 and hers is 12. $11 + 14 - 12 = 13$, so the game master must roll 13 or less on 3d6 to hit.

Different groups talk through this roll differently. If I’m the game master, I like the player to say their Dexterity or Ego out loud, then roll the dice and tell me what they got. I’ll do the little “ $+11 - \text{target’s value}$ ” in my head and tell them if they hit or not. Other people like to rearrange the spoken algebra their own way; it really doesn’t matter.

The characteristics used in the roll to hit are almost always adjusted by fast-and-momentary tactics and circumstances, determined mostly by whatever maneuver describes the stated action best.

Hitting a stationary thing or a hex-sized space at close range requires no roll; doing so at a distance uses the same roll as above, for which the target is considered to have a relevant value of 6.

But before listing those tactics and circumstances, note this well: the game master also throws in a +1 or an extra die of effect whenever someone announces something fun and exciting. There’s no limited resource, so don’t negotiate about it or plead for it – this is another one of those loosey-goosey special effects concepts, with no standards beyond who is playing and what is happening.

Fighting Maneuvers

	Offensive	Defensive	Damage/notes
Punch (any close physical attack)	+0	+0	1x damage
Grab	-1	-2	May be followed by squeeze or throw
Dodge	+0	+3	No attack

Interesting Maneuvers

	Offensive	Defensive	Damage/notes
Area effect attack	Range modifier -1/6 hexes	+0	Target area defensive value 6; attack roll is then compared to individual defensive values
Coordinated attack	-2	-2	Requires simultaneity; Knockout damage is cumulative; Knockbacks are added together
Assist	+0	-1	Requires simultaneity; provides offensive value for another attacker's use
Find Weakness	+0	+0	Increases attack effectiveness by 1d6 per successful use against a given target
Move-By	-2	-2	+d6 damage / 5 hexes moved
Move-Through	-4	-4	+d6 damage / 2 hexes moved

Martial Maneuvers

	Offensive	Defensive	Damage/notes
Martial Punch	+0	+1	+3d6 damage
Martial Kick	-2	+1	+6d6 damage
Martial Block	+0	+2	No abort for reactive use
Martial Dodge	+0	+5	No attack
Martial Throw	+ velocity/5	+0	+1d6 damage / 5 hexes moved; prone
And Out	+0	+0	½ Move following attack

Ego Maneuvers

	Offensive	Defensive	Damage/notes
			All modifiers apply for Ego-based attack and defense only
Ego Evade	+0	+3	Defensive action.
Mindscape	+2	+2	Accompanies an attack and may be maintained thereafter. As long as it is maintained, only Ego Maneuvers and Powers may be used.
Id Rush	+3	-3	Accompanies an attack. Requires an Ego roll to resist irrational action based on one or more Psychological Situations regardless of value
Mind Bar	+0	+1	Defensive action. No roll is required; the bonus applies so long as it is maintained. Locks down an attacking mental power and prevents it from being used. Maintaining the bar is a ½ Phase action. Escaping the bar is a full Phase action and requires no roll.
Mind Stab	+0	+0	Target must already be Mind-Barred; no attack roll required. Inflicts 1d6 Knockout per 1d6 points Endurance spent.
Self Mastery	+0	+0	Attack using Ego to shift level of Ego-based power affecting you downward by one level. It is not necessary to perceive the target.

Range for Dexterity-based distance attacks

	Modifier
0-3 hexes	+0
Each additional 3 hexes	-1

This and that

	Effects
Move before attacking	-1 offensive
Acrobatics	+2 defensive, move at least 2 hexes
Skill levels	+ to relevant value as assigned by player
Surprise moves	+1 to +3 offensive bonus
Prone	-3 defensive for adjacent attacks; + 3 defensive for distance attacks
Flashed or Entangled	Defensive value drops to 6

This is the complete list, so you don't have to cross-reference it with anything. The net effects are extremely dramatic, but since they're all cumulative, it's a lot to process until you get used to your hero's typical use of them. A bunch of little counters to shove around for plus and minus can help.

Example: When Grimfire punches Killer Coil, it so happens that she used the Martial Kick maneuver in her last Phase, so her defensive combat value is +1, therefore 14 instead of 13. Therefore the player's target number on 3d6 is $11 + 12 - 14 = 9$ or less.

Example: When Anybug Stink Bug Sprays Domain, it so happens that he is about 8 meters away (about 25 feet), or 4 hexes. Range modifiers work in units of -1 per 3 full hexes, so his combat value is -1, at 13 instead of 14. Therefore the player's target number on 3d6 is $11 + 13 - 11 = 13$ or less.

Example: When Domain uses Hegemony on The Which with the Id Rush Maneuver, for a +3 attacking combat value of 17. Therefore the game master's target number on 3d6 is $11 + 17 - 12 = 16$ or less.

DOWN, OUT, AND OVER

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 and are often an important event in a fight.

Getting knocked around

Strength-based impacts and the Blast power typically produce a secondary damage effect called Knockback, which is that wonderful, jet-propelled-looking long-distance sprawl that is so much fun to draw.

In addition to the ordinary damage dice, roll 1d6.

- ▶ 1 means no Knockback
- ▶ 2-5 means that many hexes of Knockback
- ▶ 6 means that the hexes of Knockback equal the Core rolled for the attack

The High Impact advantage is like always rolling a 6, so the attack's damage always equals the Core rolled. Special Defense: Knockback cancels it back to the ordinary rules. Hitting with a bat-like object gets you extra Knockback hexes per length of the object in hexes.

If you are flying or otherwise not standing on anything, or if you are currently Stunned, then roll an additional die and add the results to the first. If you are not knocked into anything, you are considering to be falling at the end of the knockback path. For every two hexes you are knocked back, take 1d6 damage

as a separate attack if you aren't sent into anything. If you are, then roll and take damage as if for the initial attack, again. A person who is knocked back ends up prone, unless they can do something about it using Strength or Acrobatics.

Given a solid surface to brace against, including the ground or floor, you may roll Strength to resist Knockback as a reactive action, spending the required Endurance. The Core rolled counteracts the hexes of Knockback one for one, with the added benefit of not being knocked prone.

Acrobatics permits a Dexterity roll to avoid being knocked prone or, if you are flying, to remain airborne at the end of the path. Neither applies if you've been knocked back into some object.

Getting Stunned

Losing Knockout points is a foregone conclusion, and in small doses it has no immediate effect. However, if, after defenses, you take Knockout damage from a single hit that equals or exceeds your Stunned value, you're stunned.

- ▶ Your defensive values for combat rolls drop to 6.
- ▶ All active Powers that cost Endurance turn off.
- ▶ You may only perform free actions during your next Phase and you cannot move at the scale of hexes. This Phase is called "recovery from being Stunned," but you do not recover Body, Knockout, or Endurance.

Getting knocked out

Predictably, if your Knockout is taken down to 0, you're knocked out. Your Endurance drops to 0 as well, and you are considered an inanimate object for all purposes of movement and targeting. You can Recover in your next Phase, to be at your Recovery value for both Knockout 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 game master says otherwise.

Getting hurt

The other kind of injury you take comes off Body, which is potentially real tissue-trauma injury. As long as Body remains above 0, there are no mandated effects of injury, but players have been known to assign their characters penalties or reduced function of some kind, just because they like to.

Body damage does recover, at 1 point per recovery action. By default, the perceived injury isn't as bad as it seemed at first, or is simply treated unrealistically in terms of permanent harm. If Body is taken to 0, it operates similarly to Knockout: the character may recover, but if Body is reduced to 0 a second time, they are rendered helpless. Furthermore, they are nominally dying.

A dying character's Endurance drops to 0 and their Knockout 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 Knockout.

- ▶ Dying is elective for a hero, occurring only at the player's choice.
- ▶ If you want justification, consider that anyone who stays with the hero can keep him or her alive, even absurdly so, like a dog or a toddler; or that thinking "must – hold – on!" may be considered a relevant action
- ▶ 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 game master's judgment.
- ▶ A dying non-player character may be declared dead by the player whose hero delivered the relevant attack.
- ▶ A dying non-player-character who came to that state by another non-player-character or some environmental effect lives or dies as the game master says.

Getting negated

Characteristics may be reduced by Weaken and Powers may be suppressed by Negate, or if it's nasty and Destructive, ruined by it.

- ▶ Strength taken to 0 dice may still be used at that value, relying on Pushing.
- ▶ Presence taken to 0 dice may still be used at that value, relying on situational modifiers.
- ▶ Dexterity may be used normally at 6 or above, below which the target is unable to direct his or her physical actions. Using Ego-based or otherwise non-physical actions depends on the circumstances, especially for their field of perception.
- ▶ Intelligence and Ego may be used normally at 6 or above, below which the target becomes confused or demotivated.
- ▶ The target must make the relevant Characteristic roll at the current value as a 0-phase action in order to direct any and all actions of any kind; failure means he or she cannot act or performs some nonsensical, non-advantageous action.
- ▶ Actions using the relevant characteristic use the current value, including 0.
- ▶ A Power whose effect is exceeded by Negate is switched off; if it is Destroyed in the process, it cannot be used at all until the recovery condition is met.

Absent relevant special effects or the Destructive Advantage, reduced features are restored by recovery actions.

- ▶ Strength and Presence regain 1d6 per Recovery, or 1d6 equal to the value rolled if Regeneration is used.

- ▶ Powers regain one unit of effect per Recovery, usually expressed as dice.
- ▶ Dexterity, Intelligence, and Ego regain 1 point per Recovery.

If any of these is taken to 0 a second time during a confrontation, an appropriate incapacitating effect occurs, equivalent to the effects for Body and Knockout.

Getting tired

In combat everyone burns Endurance like mad. You have to do it 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!

Ongoing 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.

- ▶ Pay d6 Endurance per 5 Active Points of increased effect
- ▶ Pay d6 Endurance per the Strength's or power's 5 Active Points for one of the following effects
- ▶ Area Effect (single-hex or explosion, no selective targeting)
- ▶ Piercing
- ▶ High Impact
- ▶ Severe (damage is reduced by resistant Defense)

To Push a further consecutive action, make an Ego roll. If you fail, you cannot Push this time, but merely hit the listed value on your sheet (and spend its Endurance cost). you're free to start a new Push next time, assuming you're still upright.

When Endurance hits 0, you can use Knockout instead, taking 1d6 Knockout damage for each equivalent of 2 Endurance spent. This either rolls over during an action if Endurance runs out in the middle of it, or is used to power an action from scratch if Endurance is already at 0. And always remember: Endurance is a precious commodity, to be tracked, protected, and husbanded with great care. Spending it has real, in-game consequences, and losses due to Drain are thus justly feared.

Reviewing recovery

Super-fights are a race against your own reserves, villains included. If combatants make it past the first full-powered furious assaults, they're sucking wind and fearing a solid hit. Knowing how to recover, and what, and how much, is a key factor in play.

The simplest recovery is when you're Stunned. It's involuntary and requires a full Phase. You regain no points of any kind, but when it's over, you're not Stunned any more.

The other kind is voluntary and again requires a full Phase, permitting only free actions. All of the following effects are applied.

- ▶ If Endurance and Knockout are not at full values, both regain points equal to Recovery, up to each full value
- ▶ If Strength and/or Presence are reduced by Weaken, both follow the same rule, with 1d6 restored per Recovery
- ▶ If Powers are reduced fully by Negate, they all follow the same rule, regaining a unit of effect per Recovery if the Negate is not maintained
- ▶ If Body, Dexterity, Intelligence, Ego, or Speed are damaged or reduced, they all regain 1 point

The above values also apply when Knockout or Body reaches 0 for the first time during a fight, occurring during the hero's next Phase. These values recover up from 0. If either is taken to 0 again during this fight, then the hero is unconscious or dying and will remain so throughout the fight.

The Regeneration power allows 1d6 more Body, Dexterity, Intelligence, Ego, and Speed to be regained through recovery per 10 Power Points. It does not prevent the unconscious or dying results, but it does ensure that "dying" status is entirely nominal as far as fictional causes are concerned.

The Destructive Advantage prevents the effects of the attack from being restored by recovery, although Regeneration permits restoration of Body and the other relevant scores equal to the Core value rolled. If Destructive damage takes a hero to 0 Knockout or Body, it is treated as the second time, so the hero is thoroughly unconscious or dying.

Example: Anybug has been busy in a fight, so is at Knockout 11, Endurance 20, and Body 10. He takes a Phase to recover. His Recovery 13, so Knockout and Endurance are brought up to 24 and 33 respectively, and Body is brought up to 11.

At some point thereafter, he receives 15 points of Knockout from a single blow, bringing him to 9 Knockout and Stunning him. His next Phase is automatically a recovery from being Stunned, but it does not change his current values for anything.

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 more than competitive choreography, they are confrontations.

Speaking (called “monologue,” but it includes dialogue), including Presence Attacks, uses no mechanical time at all. And unlike 0 Phase actions, which must be performed according to the Speed chart and the various modifying rules, it can be done 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, unless obvious circumstances absolutely dictate otherwise. 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 provide all the information, without needing a stopwatch at the table.

Take a look at Presence, sometimes tagged as the most significant mechanic in the system, with good reason. It is directed against a specific target or targets who can perceive the hero, affecting them and to a lesser extent everyone who can perceive the hero.

To make a Presence Attack, you roll your Presence dice outright; there’s no to-hit roll. 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. They are very definitely cumulative.

- ▶ -1d6 you’re in combat
- ▶ -1d6 you’re at a current disadvantage, including during a Recovery action
- ▶ -1d6 you are unknown to the target or have a reputation that works against what you’re saying
- ▶ -1d6 for any degree of Unusual Looks or combination of them
- ▶ -2d6 for repeating the same or similar Presence Attack against a given target (cumulative)
- ▶ -3d6 for directly contradicting the prevailing mood of the target(s)
- ▶ +1d6 you’re exhibiting a power
- ▶ +1d6 you’re doing something violent
- ▶ +2d6 as above, but very
- ▶ +3d6 as above, but very very
- ▶ +1d6 good soliloquy (you’re making sense)
- ▶ +2d6 as above, but excellent (well-suited to the target’s values and Psychological Situations)
- ▶ +3d6 as above, but incredible
- ▶ +1d6 setting is appropriate
- ▶ +2d6 setting is very appropriate

Some of these are obviously more suited to telling people something specific, and others to just wowing them into inaction, but look at how important that soliloquy and setting are. You're penalized a lot when trying to talk down or intimidate someone who's punching you and hates your guts, but if you say the right thing at the right time, you just might make your point.

- ▶ “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.

It's possible to end up with no dice and therefore no effective Presence Attack. Aside from this unhappy case, once you know the total dice, roll them and count the Core. Roll the defender's Presence as well; it is all right to roll once collectively for crowds or groups without specific known individuals in them. The defending rolls use unmodified Presence only.

Subtract the defender's result from the attacker's and use the following table.

Difference in Core	Effects
Less than 0	No effect
0 or 1	Impressed; opponents may act before the affected person this Phase if applicable
2-3	Very impressed; they will consider the content of the Attack seriously and will lose any held action or lose their upcoming ½ Phase action
4-5	Awed and inclined to comply, however briefly; they will lose any held action and their next Phase, and drop DCV to 6 until the beginning of the one after that
6+	Cowed; they may surrender, run away, or faint; if they do not, their defending value drops to 6 for the rest of the fight

Everyone who perceives the Presence Attack is affected, but those it's not specifically directed against are reduced in effect by one step. Yes, your own allies may be a little gobsmacked when you do the things you need for big dice bonuses, and you may find yourself going before Mr. Speedy for once.

Example: Grimfire punches one of the kidnappers off of some elevated point inside the burning church. With the young child held safe in one arm and his Nimbus flickering out to its full Innocence extent, he tells the others, “This place is mine now. Choose: the police outside, or me, in here!”

Let me count the ways: -1d6 for being in the midst of combat, -1d6 for his Unusual Looks (they might be too scared to think straight), +1d6 for exhibiting a Power, +2d6 for a violent action (the guy was really punched and fell hard), +2d6 for the soliloquy (that was pretty good, I think), and +2d6 for the very appropriate setting. That's +5d6 to his base Presence of 4d6, for 9 dice total.

One consideration is the mood of the target: in this case, these opponents' scheme had already gone awry and they were not invested in any kind of endgame-showdown with Grimfire. Against fanatics who were seeking exactly that, he would have lost 3 more dice for the Presence Attack.

There is a single, specific zone of immunity: the Dependent NPCs and Hunteds are immune to the Presence of the hero whose sheet they're on.

Presence effects ripple throughout all the other mechanics in high-infinite forms. Sacrificing Endurance may be the guts of a super confrontation, but Presence is its heart.

HAZARDS YOU CAN FIGHT

At the smaller scale of immediate combat, hazards are less like environments and more like opponents, so they are a little more customized and easier to fight directly.

The basics remain the same: a hazard is located in an area defined by one or more hexes, it has Speed 2, and its effects are expressed by powers with default 60 Active Points which do not need to roll to hit, as organized with the Hazard rubric. The big difference is that instead of a diffuse effect throughout that area, the hazard is actually a thing, so it can be targeted and fought as such, it can move with a default running speed of 6 hexes, and the area that it affects doesn't have to be the hexes it's in, or the same size.

It can be fought by delivering ordinary damage to its physical location, removing its size by one hex. Its combat value is 6 and its Defense and Body apply to each hex. One of the aggravating features of this type of hazard is that its effectiveness is not at all reduced accordingly; it continues to be its annoying or even deadly self until it's all gone. Therefore if it occupies several or many hexes, it can take a lot of time or a concerted effort by several allies to get rid of, and all the while it can still produce its full effect.

One common combat hazard is made of people, in this case a concerted small group, like a squad or little mob rather than the diffuse effect of a large crowd. If they have ranged weapons, the effect acts as a cone or adjacent area, but they also have an Entangle effect if you get in there with them, with may be fought directly with Strength or avoided with Acrobatics. Perhaps their most important feature is that you can't ignore them, as they will run about doing things the heroes don't want, like killing hostages or setting off devices.

Also, they are subject to Presence Attacks, with a score of 2d6 for defensive purposes. This may seem small but the -1d6 for combat and -3d6 for prevailing mood apply at all times, and if they are associated with a hero's Hunted Situation, or are conceivably a Dependent NPC, then they enjoy the standard immunity to that hero's Presence.

LUCK IN A FIGHT

Luck is rolled in combat when things are going badly for the hero's goals: something or someone they want to protect is in more danger than before, someone on their side has been taken out of the fight to any extent; an opponent appears positioned to achieve their overall goal; or the social or more general context of the fight has turned against the heroes. Unluck applies for all the opposite circumstances.

In combat, their effects apply to logistic and momentary details rather than to the general, situational, or potentially plot-shaping effects they have in less hectic circumstances. They bring in physical and other circumstances that are unexpectedly more helpful or unhelpful, but which are easily understood to be already present, rather than things happening from out of the blue. If you're into realism, then Unluck is the perfect opportunity to dial down the "comic-book" for a moment, to the hero's dismay.

Core rolled Effects

0	No effect
1	Some object or structure provides useful vantage or protection, your current position is more advantageous than it seemed, an ally is well-placed for cooperating with something, someone's covert participation in the situation is now evident
2	Some object or event is helpful to your powers' special effects, useful information suddenly becomes evident, an opportunity for surprise arises, an opponent encounters unexpected difficulty
3	Someone you needed to protect is taking care of themselves, someone you wanted to stop loses a clear path to their goal, the thing you wanted to get is now coincidentally in your possession
4	As 1 but applies to everyone in the situation whom you like and would want to help
5	As 2 but applies to everyone in the situation whom you like and would want to help
6	As 3 but applies to everyone in the situation whom you like and would want to help

Unluck is rolled when things are going well for the hero: they appear positioned to achieve their overall goal; their intended messaging is working; or one or more opponents have been taken out of the fight to any extent

Core rolled Effects

0	No effect
1	A difficult surface or inconvenient object, impairs movement, an equipment malfunction or frequency interference loses a little time, a distracting detail or event loses perception of an intended target
2	A power goes awry or its special effects are blunted by something or other, necessary communication is impaired, something you secured goes missing, a new event divides your attention
3	A significant change occurs to the physical or social context for the confrontation, an opponent gains a significant advantage for their next action, your overall goal becomes more complicated or less available
4	As 1 but applies to everyone in the situation whom you like and would want to help
5	As 2 but applies to everyone in the situation whom you like and would want to help
6	As 3 but applies to everyone in the situation whom you like and would want to help



In the multiple-action, high-dialogue context of playing combat situations, the Luck/Unluck results need to be kept quick, so it's most pragmatic for the game master to deliver them as rapid punctuations of what's going on.

CHAPTER 12

DYNAMIC MECHANICS



There is, indeed, a learning curve with Champions. The mechanics are robust from the start, so they won't screw anyone over just because they're new at them. But they're also built to sink your teeth into, specific to your heroes and villains. All these Point-quantified things are inter-connected devices which move, and whose driving engine is you.

FIGHTING SMART

What is any given fight about? “What are we fighting for?”

Or better yet, “What are they fighting for, or to do, or to get?” Only the most simplistic comics featured a villain who's committing crimes and a hero who jumps in, fights them toe to toe, and stops them because the villain goes down first. These were isolated filler stories. Superhero comics in all ages of the medium usually posed more interesting social circumstances, more difficult conditions of knowledge and its absence, and above all, more uniquely motivated villains. Villains don't fight in order to win fights. They have goals to strive for and problems to solve.

Furthermore, the mechanics are built so that no one can “just” beat anyone else. The treacherous dice, the energy requirements, and the shifting contingencies of combat make the outcome more iffy as a fight continues, rather than less. If someone hasn't decked the other person quickly, and if both opponents are in it to the last one standing, then it's time to think – or lose.

Fighting smart relies on Speed and teamwork, which are all about timing, but also on Presence and the terrible twins, Luck/Unluck, which don't care about timing at all.

With just one run through a fight situation, you can easily see that the Speed Characteristic's main job is the promptness of someone's reactions. It's more psychological than physiological, and more than one favorite speedster from the comics is better described with maximal movement, accuracy, and impact mechanics rather than maximal Speed.

If you do have high Speed and use it just to do more actions, you'll be blowing a lot more Endurance, to the point of falling straight into a trap. It's better used to manage actions, rather than simply piling up a lot of them on a known schedule. Consider losing a Phase due to being Stunned or to take a Recovery action. Having an extra Phase or two operates like a soak for these, with the added benefit that most people will be losing most or the rest of the six-Segment turn when they take what you just took, and you're still coming in next at about the time they'd be if they hadn't been Stunned or recovering.

Every superhero group has its own meaning of “team” in fight situations. With a nod back to Chapter 2, even the noblest superheroes are super dirty fighters, and the question is how organized they want to be in setting up and ganging up on their opponents. They vary from hardly any to highly-practiced ‘tac squad, but there’s always just a bit of teamwork.

Teamwork relies mainly on timing. The simplest version is taking advantage of Speed windows or moments of vulnerability while Stunned or Flashed. With held actions, though, heroes can strike in concert.

- ▶ The Coordinated Attack Maneuver provides exact simultaneity given one or more heroes holding actions; the attacks which succeed total their Knockout before defenses apply.
- ▶ The Assist Maneuver permits one hero to use the attacking Characteristic and bonuses of another who is directing his or her actions, again, given that one or both has held an action in order to perform simultaneously. More than one speedy, evasive hero has met an unpleasant fate from the ox-like bruiser who let his or her strike be mentally guided by an observant, Ego-based, hyper-aware partner.
- ▶ Heroes may arrive at useful, often entertaining combinations of their unique abilities, some of which have even gained names of their own in comics.

Sudden or well-placed attacks get surprise bonuses, but such things are hard to assign unless they use concrete features of the surroundings, accurately exploit the target’s priorities, or arrive when they are paying attention to something else. If you have a useful attack and want to be sure it lands, your friends can distract or impede the vision of a powerful opponent they have little chance to take down, setting them up for you.

In order to keep that same thing from happening to them, members of especially cooperative hero teams tend to talk a lot about what they see and what they think is going on. It does seem a bit odd, as if the place were full of brightly-clad athletes acting as their own sports announcers, but the habit is practical, for a group “eyes on” effect to keep anyone from getting bushwhacked.

All this positioning and timing may seem like a deterministic chess match, but then along come the great disruptors of anything so straightforward as space/time: Presence and Luck.

Presence Attacks during combat are mostly for entrances, as their effectiveness drops sharply in the thick of things. Personal staging is harder to arrange, the targets’ intentions are typically not cooperative, and repetition is penalized. The significant exception concerns valuable content or context about the fight, for the extra dice for monologues. Here’s where prior events and current relationships matter most, as even the most ruthless villain may care about the fate of one or more heroes or be influenced by the relationship to a third party shared with one of them.

What really makes the difference for Presence is its independence from the Speed Chart and even from anything resembling plausible time. The Presence Attack is the low-Speed combatant's revenge: anyone can Presence Attack anybody, whenever, and a good roll disrupts the target's timing, forcing hesitations and lost actions. It's a big wrench thrown right into the chessmaster's careful arrangement of Phases and Maneuvers.

As a best practice, heroes should not use Presence Attacks on each other unless it's fun, like slowing down Enrages or helping to battle Mind Control. If they arise in an ethical dispute, players may be reassured to recall that Presence is not itself Mind Control and that although "consider deeply" may take them aback for now, it does not mean "submit" or "agree."

Not even Presence qualifies for the biggest monkey wrench award, however. Fear Luck and Unluck alike! They laugh at mere bonuses or other statistical adjustments, as they change the whole contexts in which rolls are made in the first place.

I don't even know where to start. Big things fall over. People run around in wrong directions. Inanimate objects inexplicably arrive in unlikely spots. Devices stop working, or perhaps worse, begin. Someone says exactly the right or wrong thing. What you grab isn't what you thought. All these and more happen to us, real people, in our daily lives, so imagine the equivalent for a super-powered crisis. And there's not a Characteristic, Skill, or Power that can prevent it.

With either or both of them firing off, possibly on both sides of a confrontation, a straightforward fight becomes a mad scramble over who can adapt faster to whatever just happened.

STRONG STUFF

There is no such thing as *"the Brick."* Ten super-strong heroes should each have his or her own interesting profile of special effects, Characteristics, Powers, and Modifiers to showcase how Strength is done in addition to merely having Strength. (1)

Special effects play up and define Strength just as they would for a fire-bolt or a pool of demonic shadow. For example, think of someone using the Block Maneuver against a punch that's strong enough to shatter a concrete wall. Since special effects can be hardened into mechanics, any of these (or anything like them) could be used to reflect the might on display:

- ▶ Half the Knockout damage gets through anyway; defenses apply
- ▶ Require an Endurance expenditure in order to defend
- ▶ Apply Knockback as if the strike had been successful

If you want builds instead of momentary special effects, the mechanics are just sitting there waiting. Although one must reluctantly admit that the famous superlatives – unstoppable, immovable, invulnerable – will never literally be the case, you can get pretty close.

Higher Strength may be made Conditional for Situations; Susceptibility, Vulnerability, and Dependence may damage a hero, but there's nothing like heaving up an otherwise impossibly-heavy object while you're reeling from that very damage. And you can't unsee it: Enrage begs for Strength and associated Powers that only work under its influence or following recovery from it. Finally, small-ish Powers can be attached to punches as Strikes that add their effects, for extra pain and disorientation. A Severe little Blast with Strike and No Endurance Cost sets up the "too strong to block safely" effect formally if you want. (2)

Consider defense as well, with the special effect of just flexing real hard, possibly with the Costs Endurance Limitation for extra drama and pushing potential. Such things might be Special Defense: Knockback tied to a Dodge or Block, or Force Field which only works against Knockback, and of course, Special Defense: Ego. More actively, one's physical might can be extended for others' benefit, like a Force Wall with No Range, defined merely as looming into the attack: "Get behind me!" thud thud thud.

How about tactics? The basic rule is easy: hitting things, throwing things, and crushing things all do damage based on the Strength you were using. Things were made to be broken, after all, and you don't have to wait for a game master to fill in what. Pushing for Piercing gives Strength terribly destructive force against them, and 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.

But there's more to it, because more than anything else in the system, Strength moves things around. You can throw anything! If it's one level below you on the Strength chart, you can shove or heave it a couple of hexes, and if it's two levels below, you can really wing it somewhere, a number of hexes equal to the Strength dice you're using. Pushing, obviously, bumps you higher on the chart.

A couple of technical points on throwing: an aerodynamic object can target a person or something like that, but a non-aerodynamic object targets hexes appropriate to its size. A willing person is aerodynamic; an unwilling one is not. Also, at least one of the objects has to take damage upon impact, and it's up to the thrower to say which, or both.

And who said Knockback can't be given a direction? "I'm hitting them that way!" Remember that business about targeting vulnerable points of structures? It's even better if you punch someone into the super- duper scary, enormous device and bury them in its so-expensive, now-useless pieces. The converse is nasty too: if you have a size advantage from Growth or combine your punch with a leaping attack, you can pound someone straight down and the ground will hit back.

When Strength is pitted against Strength, or against its equivalent in movement (1d6 per 5 hexes), matters are resolved with Body rolls. The moment of impact or tug-of-war can be tough on something in the middle though!

MOVE IT

Simply getting from here to there, because you want to go and have the hexes, are the movement powers' least important or interesting feature. Playing them well starts with considering what each movement power feels like for each hero.

Take flight, for instance. The comics are always very clear about it: some fliers seem to be swimming, some are soaring, some are jet-propelled, some walk normally except for not needing the ground, others float, others use wings similar to birds, glide using devices or clothing, and still others are riding a fantastic version of a familiar high-velocity object or vehicle. Some leave a trail of effect, some make an accompanying sound. No one “just” flies, and their respective properties are used to their minor advantage and disadvantage all the time.

The same applies for all movement powers, for instance, whether your Teleport involves subjective movement through weird intervening space, and so on through the list. They should all be played generously, for example, high-velocity or nominally less-controlled flight definitions are more maneuverable or adjustable than they could really be. Also, in ordinary situations, heroes do not run into lampposts and they can swerve at angles under 90 without trouble. They can do plenty of things without penalties or complications, including most 0-Phase or half-Phase actions, by dropping a hex of their total movement based on Endurance spending, or as much as called for if it involves shifting vertically. Move attacks are included in this concept, as they carry their own modifiers.

However, there is no moving-power concept which allows a hero to go where they will, however they will, oriented as they will, free to do anything they want along the way, free from any action/reaction, guaranteed of a safe stop or turn. Since fighting or hazardous situations quickly shift out of the ideal, daring actions on the go push the limits of the movement's special effects. Many hazards explicitly impose this danger, as do attempting sharper turns and sudden changes in altitude. Dexterity rolls may get you through, but if you're surprised, and if you don't have Acrobatics, then the roll is dropped to 6, modified only by relevant Skill Levels if you have any.

Every hero's super-movement, then, has its own little nuances waiting for whatever can go wrong: because it will! Everything previously hand-waved about momentum, turn radius, and, you know, gravity kicks in, depending on the situation and the movement itself. Absent obvious adverse side-effects of the powers in action, convert your current hexes of movement into Knockback in the most plausible and least desirable direction. Apply all the modifiers for Knockback, especially to Flight.

The same principles apply to orienting among obstacles. Most of the time, in the absence of a designated hazard, heroes stay oriented and don't blunder into lampposts by default. But this default can be disrupted by a long list of events: getting hit by a surprise move, getting Stunned, getting Knocked Back or thrown somewhere, particularly into and through something, receiving contradictory information. Unexpectedly encountering changed circumstances will do it too, for instance, after recovering from being Flashed or perceiving your way through Concealment.

The governing mechanic is the Perception roll, based on Intelligence and relevant Skill Levels, as a 0-Phase action. Think of that quick lane-check speeding heroes do in the comics, often accompanied by a thought balloon to keep the reader oriented, and also of how the next panel might be their push to do what they're trying to do, or an unfortunate collision because they took their eyes off the road.

Staying oriented maintains the movement action as intended and also allows you to turn a moving reactive defense into active tactics. Think of it as suddenly getting two free hexes, so go two hexes in a direction or to a location you want, Acrobatically if possible. The latter not only provides a bonus to your defensive value but significantly expands your options for the landing spot.

A failed roll, however, converts your immediate location into a standard hazard, customized as in Chapter 11. And no, you don't get a new Dexterity roll or reactive defense. Failing the perception was the whole screwdriver and you're screwed.

The one-stop solution for this general problem is the Awareness Power, to provide broader and better sensing of one's immediate situation, greatly increasing the safety range for not even needing to roll to orient. However, even that Power encounters limits in terms of exact senses and their special effects, e.g., its vulnerability to overload.

Teleporting is supposed to be fun, so it's overdoing things to require perception checks before and after, every time. It's best to treat it the same as running around, only with weirder possible consequences in more difficult situations. Teleporting heroes are well-advised to include the above-mentioned Awareness, even if it's Limited to apply only to that movement.

Sooner or later, special effects and stressful circumstances will lead someone to try teleporting "blind," without being able to perceive the destination. The easiest solution is simply to decree that without a perceived destination, the Power cannot work. However, that's no fun; so if the acting player accepts some risk and states the intended distance and intended direction/location, go for it. If the attempt was triggered by the Involuntary Limitation, operating irrationally, or due to a Psychological Situation, then set the range at maximum plus a Push. If someone is unfortunate enough to occupy a solid space, presumably the effect isn't good, according to whatever hazard is best suited to the current special effects.

Things get really funky with Expanded Scope in both Awareness and Teleport, as the hero becomes a global, interstellar, dimensional, temporal, or psychic journeyer. Although that's obviously cool for the situations and stories of play, failing to orient properly becomes considerably more dire. The consequences for others who may be involved, when they lack these abilities, should be left to the imagination. (4)

Moving others can be as good as moving oneself; a purpose for which the attacking form of Teleport is remarkably nasty! It can be highly characteristic and thematic given the choice of Modifiers, such as the “castling” or “switch places” version. Applications with other Powers may be refined quite tightly, as with the hero who used fine-work Telekinesis, Skill Levels with Grab, and attacking Teleport Limited to small items only. It's a bad day for the heavily-armed opponents who see the hero smile, open his hand, and drop the pins from the grenades they're wearing on their vests.

Tunneling is obviously intimately connected with terrain, and its concept range is very wide. Its special effects may be defined to remove substances automatically, not at all, or opportunistically, and it works on any solid barrier or substrate and not just the ground. So it doesn't have to be literal burrowing at all. For example a “desolid field” so that you can turn the immediate surroundings intangible, or an energy discharge tied to a Piercing Strike which delivers awesome destruction to the area your target's in, as well as upon them.

There's moving through and around terrain, and then there's moving it around. Tunneling in its more aggressive forms is an obvious way to tear up the joint, not only making holes but doing something with the leftovers. Adding Force Wall allows you to re-shape the whole place as you please. Force Wall by itself cannot provide support, like a floor or bridge, but combining it with Telekinesis can, either directly or by adding existing structures or substances into the mix of making holes or new barriers. Combining these powers with Entangle and Concealment yields so many applications, depending on nuances of linking or relative values, that they almost comprise their own subset of the rules.

THE WAY OF FISTS AND FEET

The Martial Arts maneuvers are only a little more effective on their own. The real opportunity is to create your own combat strategy with “martial arts” as a lens to see the same rules everyone else is using, but in a different way.

High Speed fits right in, in a sneaky way that rarely does any more actions than anyone else. A held action may be fired off at the end of the Segment just before the Phase for the next scheduled action, then that action may be held. You're fighting one Segment into the future and they're always one step behind, and you can even deliver a rapid-fire one-two when you choose. It also means you can

abort the held action for a necessary reactive defensive move without losing the upcoming scheduled one.

The Maneuvers are savage in this context. The Attacks don't cost Endurance for their extra dice, bypassing that particular downside of Speed. Martial Block and And Out provide defense and movement at moments that other people don't have.

Messing with others' Speed Charts is possible too. Even minimal success with a Presence Attack robs opponents of their expected positions in the order, and Find Weakness allows for potentially Stunning blows, forcing lost Phases and opening up repeated strikes. Find Weakness may not seem like much, just one piddly die more, but it can be used multiple times against a single target as long as you keep succeeding. And the effect doesn't go away! That opponent remains vulnerable to that attack for the rest of the fight.



That's why confrontations between martial artists often begin with the combatants staring oddly at each other: they're using Find Weakness and a Presence Attack in a duel of forced hesitation and held actions, to gain the advantage for a devastating strike.

The other benefit 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 favorite Maneuvers.

Strike can be attached to any attack maneuver – want your Throw to immobilize someone? That's an Entangle. A disorienting blow? That's a Flash. Choke hold? No problem, attach Severe Blast to the follow-up squeeze on a Grab, which requires no attack roll. A big one can even be Conditional, to apply only to a second consecutive strike on a given target. It works just as well for defense, so that not even a hit hits, sometimes. Consider Force Field plus substantial Special Defense: Knockback tied to blocking or dodging, or even Desolid with the right Conditional Limitation.

Nevermind the “Glass Ninja” concept either. Consider instead that taking a beating can be its own superpower. Considerable extra Body and Powers may have be Conditional upon recovering from being Stunned. Or what if such benefits are Conditional upon recovering from Enraged, making you more focused and effective, albeit not particularly reasonable? That sounds more like the great pop culture martial artists to me.

The fighting style may certainly include all manner of mystic, psychic, or mental resources which ignore the simplistic brains-brawn divide. Mental Discipline and Special Defense: Ego are a nasty surprise for the Psychic Psycho who encounters your California-Zen-Tao training, and the Invulnerable Indestructo will be equally unhappy with your Ego-based Drain Strength Strike.

And those are just individual Powers! You should be dreaming up a whole Framework about right now.

SNEAKIER THAN THOU

I can think of nothing more tedious in role-playing than hashing out mechanics for “we sneak past the guards.” Leave that stuff to the so-called agents. For heroes, stealth is about combat tactics, not avoidance: appearing and disappearing in the moment, one with the shadows, striking at will, and mastering the whole situation by controlling who perceives what. To address these circumstances, the various rolls to hide and perceive operate in a strict hierarchy.

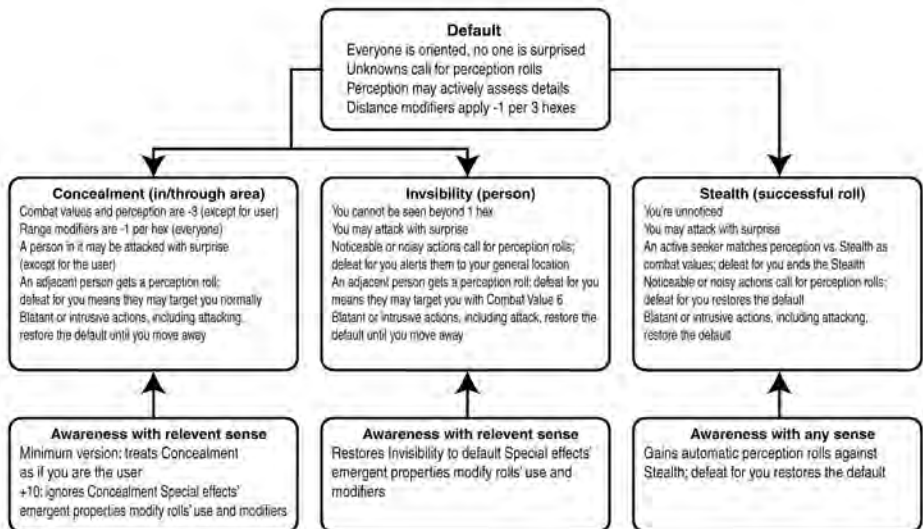
The default is that everyone can see or reasonably sense what's going on in their ordinary field without trying, and that typically a Perception roll is only called for when someone tries to discern something difficult. You don't have to roll to notice that some guy flew in and is trying to hit you.

The simplest outcome is whether the sneaky character can attack with a surprise ambush, when and if the other parties have no idea that you're even there, or have tried to find you and failed. It's nastier than the usual surprise bonus: the target's defensive value drops to 6, no reactive defense is possible, and he or she takes double Knockout damage before defenses, or an equivalent increase for other attacks.

A more complex case arises when one character stalks another to trade off attacks with hiding, or even more so, when both combatants are doing it in a relatively confusing or complex environment. The whole diagram may be called into play across many Phases, turning the fight into a ruthless dance of timing, recovery, Skill and perception rolls, distance management, set-up, and ambush.

When someone "loses" the duel of perception in this situation, they are not gobsmacked as if they'd been ambushed out of nowhere. The attacker gains the maximal surprise bonus of +3, and the defender may use reactive defenses.

Keep in mind the difference between the two sneaky Powers: Invisibility affects persons (more generally, living things) whereas Concealment affects areas. Therefore the Area Advantage provides personal Invisibility to people in an area, but does not affect the area or objects in it.



GOING MENTAL

The question about mental-psychological powers is whether they're an additional venue for glowing power-on-power combat, or a whole realm of insidious and disturbing conflict. The first is nicely suited to applying the Ego-Based Advantage freely and also providing Expanded Scope to Awareness and Teleport into freaky dream or supernatural dimensions. This approach veers into pop mystic and psychedelic territory, a fine place to go. The second is wonderfully exacerbated by the Invisible Special Effects Advantage, irrational Psychological Situations, misconceptions, disinformation, and perhaps the Mystery Powers concept presented in Chapter 15. This approach brings forward psychology, personality, motives, memories, reactions, trauma, and related matters.

In construction terms, Ego-based powers' Modifiers interplay well with Psychological Situations, as indicated by some of the rules. A group may like to systematize these further by matching the parameters for Psychological Situations to each level of each Ego-based power.

The further you go with such ideas, players' agency via their characters will shift its boundaries into new places. This is fine as long as it's a shift to understandable procedures, not a sprawl into disempowered play. 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 to spend some play time for the character to express it.

Just as a high Strength value doesn't provide comics super-strength all by itself, no single Ego-based Power provides mental and emotional mastery. To play like the mental heavy-hitters in comics, you'll have to combine two or more of them into single attacks.

Images risks being overlooked. Compared with tossing a Chrysler (or toppling the Chrysler Building), showing pretty pictures to a single target doesn't seem like much of a power. The first counter to that is that the minimal effect means that the target genuinely perceives whatever the image is, and the target doesn't realize they're being affected.

Overcoming that deception is hard. Some external stimulus must be involved, whether it's someone trying to "wake" you, another sense receiving a powerful countering impression, or something that contradicts the illusion affecting you dramatically; like, say, being hit by something else or stepping off a cliff! In the absence of utterly contradictory input, the target must experience something of this kind and succeed with a perception roll using an unaffected sense. Even realizing the images are false doesn't make them stop, although once you do you can choose to ignore them and disciplined heroes can shift the effect down with the Self Mastery maneuver.

Continuing Images requires continuing to spend Endurance. But you can also reduce or increase the effect, rolling the appropriate number of effect dice, with no required new attack roll, so the continuing Endurance cost is based on that effect.

Images' applications vary immensely. One spin is to not to deceive at all, but rather to depict or communicate something. This may still be its own form of attack, using confusion and distraction, especially if the content is coordinated with a Presence Attack. Perhaps it's not even an attack, but a useful way to let one's allies know important visual information, such as directions, someone's appearance, or their Psychological Situations, perhaps backstopped with Detective Work or Telepathy.

When believing the images are real is the point, then a high effect is the key. But consider combining it with some other Power which itself carries the Separate Advantage; after all, a complex image becomes a lot more convincing if part of it just punched you in the face. Furthermore, since the biggest risk to Images is contradictory impressions, Concealment of whatever the Images are not is a very effective partner Power.

Higher levels of effect may alter the target's concept of their whole environment. It's easier to change the perceived environment a lot, i.e., "the surface of Mars," "trapped in infernal flames," than to do it subtly, like "everyone around you has a clockwork key protruding from the backs of their necks." When the altered environment includes the absence of specific people in it, yourself for instance, then Concealment or Invisibility can backstop it if the illusions don't make it to the needed effect. If you're looking for disorientation and physical helplessness, then Entangle, Flash, and even Severe Blast damage are fine participants too.

Any of these applications may be expanded to affect multiple targets with an Area Effect, which, if deceptive, is effectively backstopped with Concealment over the same area and following up with precise uses of Telekinesis. The affected area does not have to be filled with images, i.e., they don't have to be continuous within it, but the entire area which contains any of them is considered a single area in terms of how many hexes are affected.

By itself, Images won't alter the target's feelings or beliefs about the situation, nor will it access their existing emotions or memories for the visual content. These and similar effects require adding Telepathy. If the desired effect includes a specific directive, then you need Mind Control too.

Mind Control is arguably the laziest, most unsatisfying plot device in superhero comics, but it is occasionally redeemed when everyone understands that the literal power's sole purpose is to be broken. It isn't being controlled that matters, but what follows after: the wreckage, reflection, recovery of oneself, and discovery of others' views. (3)

The rules are tuned to reinforce the “made to be broken” principle. First, the Power by itself is more limited than it looks, as it can only enforce an explicit order which precedes or accompanies the attack roll. For the orders to be willed rather than communicated normally, you need minimal Telepathy, and effects like “forget” or “believe” require much stronger Telepathy. To make the target see or otherwise perceive what isn’t the case, which can go a long way toward meeting the requirements for specific levels of effect, you need Images.

Unfortunately for the target, each attack roll constitutes the only substantial moment of potential refusal. Psychological Situations 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. The only effective resistance mechanic is Mental Discipline to reduce its effect.

When acting under its influence, the target may perform any actions consistent with the command, e.g., making tactical choices in combat when directed to fight. The character knows he or she is mind-controlled and although they can’t do anything else that requires a Phase action, they may take free actions. Commands like “act normal” or “stay silent” can shut those down, or other Ego-based powers can strike deeper to reinforce submission.

A separate Mind Control attack is required for every command, therefore carrying its own Endurance cost as well. Although the Power is not technically maintained, it may be continued through consecutive attacks in order to arrive at some desired action by the target. Those who anticipate extensive rather than momentary control should take the Persistent Advantage.

Puppeting levels of control are possible, but they not accounted for by any single Power, requiring a customized mix of Mind Control, the Persistent Advantage, Telepathy, and Images at the very least, and likely Awareness with Expanded Scope. The complex build and high numbers of required Points reflect the comics convention that people with this ability are pure specialists in its use, and as with many complex systems, it is riddled with ways to go awry.

Telekinesis reinforces other Ego powers’ effects with tangible movement or impact. It may provide significant auxiliary effects, such as providing Images with physical manifestations, or restricting the movement and therefore maintaining the perceptual range of targets for Telepathy and Mind Control. Plenty of other concepts for mental prowess do well to include it.

The default application isn’t sensory, but it can be made so by including Awareness, for an extended sensory self which can actually do things, without going so far as the Separate Advantage.

Telepathy is a catch-all term for 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 repeating the initial Endurance expenditure per Phase. The most

benign form is as described in Chapter 6, which nothing more than a mental phone call. Going by comics conventions, language and alien-ness present little or no barrier to communication. But if that sort of thing matters in the concept of your game, treat it as a special effect which manifests as Special Defense: Ego.

More hostile applications include finding something out, which can be made far more effective and interesting by including Mind Control and Images. Such play results in complex interactions among Psychological Situations, secrets, memories, and reactions. Managing content for these effects can be tricky, as 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, the target can't say, "Sorry, I suppressed that info into my subconscious, you didn't dig deep enough." Treat thoughts effectively as solid objects and the mind as a room with varying degrees of put-away and in-the-open, and stay as simplistic as possible regarding "where something is," without weaseling.

Then there's altering the target's memories or personality, which is obviously a really villainous thing to do, although the odd comics hero has been known to do it "just this once." Even with a solid roll for the Telepathy, you need to include Images to provide a memory that won't fall apart when questioned. Implanting convictions doesn't include directives unless Mind Control is included.

The **Mental Discipline** Skill unlocks the Ego Maneuvers, most of which do not require using Ego-based Powers and are quite a boon to the hero who does not specialize in them, particularly if they are strong-willed. Using them does not make you oblivious to anything and ordinary defenses and defense options apply unless some special effect causes trouble for them.

Adding the Usable On/For Others Advantage to the **Special Defense: Ego** power 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. Suppress is also useful in this fashion, but unlike Special Defense: Ego, it cannot be used against any Ego-based Power as such, but only against any/all Powers which conform to a particular special effect.

A hero specializing in Ego-based powers is not obliged to apply the Advantage of the same name for other Powers, because physical vs. psychic concepts don't have to line up precisely with Dexterity-based vs. Ego-based mechanics. Special effects are what you say they are, so it's fine to include powers that attack using Dexterity in your stable of "psychic powers." The benefit of the Advantage is found in limited defenses: plenty of adversaries may have high Dexterity, Skill Levels for fighting, and Defense, but not so many with commensurate values regarding Ego. A solid Blast or Entangle attacking from that "angle" of the mechanics can deliver a real surprise. Therefore, for the same Active Points, you can choose between more dice for the Dexterity-based version or foes' potential vulnerability for the Ego-based one.

Another technique is to tie Ego-based Powers to Skills, especially Detective Work and Computer Programming, such as Telepathy for ferreting out secret information, perhaps combined with Images to arrive at important visual information, like a specific face.

Awareness with Expanded Scope takes these effects to a frightening level, especially for Skills. It uses perception by default, and it may stay that way and be used in tandem with an Ego-based Power, or be tied to the same Skill as an Ego-based Power. It permits Ego-based Powers to work into or across the perceived range, which themselves may be refined in terms of the hero's specialized knowledge and insights based on features that are not expressed in Points. This fits just right with Detective Work, for the find-anyone-for-I-am-the-night type of hero. Less subtly, it can also strike at people directly through their minds from afar.

Making the Awareness power directly Ego-based produces special properties that arguably qualify the character as a true mental master, as the presence and activity of minds becomes the perceived feature, not limited to or defined by the physical senses as Awareness ordinarily is.

A common application is to hunt for a single mind, seeking its location in either physical space or, conceivably, whatever spaces or equivalents are represented by the scope of Awareness, but unhindered by the physical or metaphysical difficulties of the area, or such evasions as Stealth, Concealment, or Invisibility. Once you have the successful Ego roll that serves as the perception into the appropriate region or realm, hunting for the mind requires an attack roll for Telepathy. If the Telepathy attack roll succeeds, then the target is known to be present if that was an issue. If the target isn't there, then if the same roll succeeds as a basic Ego check, the hero discovers as much.

Given a success, the target may be located given the degree of effect. If the target is familiar to the searcher, the necessary effect is minimal. A data-match based on knowledge gained in some concrete way, e.g., Detective Work, requires the second level of effect, and to find someone defined along the line of "the person planning to murder the mayor tonight," the third level of Telepathy must be achieved. These values are all shifted one level higher in effect if the region or realm is crowded with other minds.

The Power may be maintained and the effect rolled again, requiring Endurance, in order to achieve a higher effect, perhaps with Pushing, to zero in on the location. An intermediate level of effect, i.e., not enough for an exact location but better than merely knowing that they are present, reduces the degree of scope, i.e., "accounts for" most of the region or realm. For geographic locations, even if the precise location is not discerned, this degree of success may permit more mundane searching now that the area concerned has been narrowed down.

Such mind scanning is a fairly minimal application of the Advantage. It all goes mad, in the good way, when you have a movement power at the same degree of Expanded Scope, to combine “knowing and going.” The hero becomes an explorer, traveler, and even denizen of the freakier, more psychic dimensions, connected dreamscapes, or even whole realms defined by metaphysical concepts, where “cosmic,” “philosophical,” and “mystic” special effects are the same thing. When you apply the potential communications and control effects of Powers across this level of perception and movement, it’s literally a game-changing capability.

WEAPONRY

The system features no rules subset for the technological range of ways to injure people. You can be a weapon-wielding hero simply as a special effect for Powers. Missile Deflection, Strike, and Blast are the most obvious, as well as your pick of Area, defenses Usable for Others, and whatever else. A bit of added Flash as a Strike is particularly appropriate. But they are no different, as Powers, from any other special effect.

The good side of the special effect, i.e., holding this particular weapon, is that it’s cool-looking and demonstrates something remarkable and fun about the hero because they made it, or have the right to it, or can use it at all. That’s about it.

The bad side is that the thing can be damaged, lost, left behind, or taken away. Granted, the whole point of special effects is that their impact is opportunistic and inconsistent, so be comforted by the plot proviso that your khukuri or widgeo or ray-gun will be replaced, recovered, or otherwise returned to your use; especially if you put some effort into it. Also, such events won’t happen to you any more frequently than anyone else’s Powers’ special effects giving them the business once in a while.

Beware the Focus Limitation! It is not for heroes, at least not in the simplistic sense that “My thing is an object, so it must be a Focus.” It’s not synonymous with “the power comes from an object,” instead, it means the power will be broken, interfered with, or taken away. Not “can,” but will, and what’s more, with merely an ordinary attack. The signature weapons wielded by the comics heroes do not correspond with the rules for Focus at all; I can’t think of a single one. As discussed in Chapter 7: Villain Making, Focus is usually a villain thing, especially when it applies to a whole object rather than to some aspect of a complex power. (5)

The other weapons to appear in play are typically directed at your hero. Hazards of this sort, say, an automated device, a military vehicle, or a squad of soldiers, may of course be any Power, but the most straightforward is Blast, with the fortunate quality of being vulnerable to ordinary attacks. Designated as a weapon or not, they are as dangerous as they are defined to be, based on Powers and Points.

Such a thing is also likely to appear as part of a foe's Powers, constructed in the ordinary fashion. It might be just like the one a hero will have, so in mechanics terms, that usually means the Powers are unmodified or modified with some weaknesses of being that particular weapon or device. For certain kinds of villains, however, putting all or nearly all the oomph into a Focus is practically standard, perhaps reinforced with some unhealthy mindset or relationship with it, expressed as Psychological Situations with irrational and meltdown components. Given the generous higher range for a villain's Ratio, this kind of thing represents an extravagant mismatch between the outrageous things the device is certain to do and the all-or-nothing quality of trying to grab or damage it.

Now for the gray area: the pick-it-up situations, when the minion's ray-gun or the agent's Desert Eagle .50 AE clatters over there, and you dive-and-roll, coming to a crouch with it raised up to fire. What happens? It seems hardly fair to say otherwise, so you go right ahead and turn that hazard, constructed as written, upon whomever you want. Altering its function might be impossible or require a specialized Skill like Computer Programming.

May I keep it? You may, if you use Points to construct a new Power with the special effect of owning and using this thing (see Chapter 15: You Must Change). Depending on what you do with the Points, it may function much as it did at first appearance or, somehow, be re-imagined differently, with the original vanishing into the common comics memory hole. If you don't commit the Points to it, however, at the end of the fight or immediate situation, it goes away. Explain or depict that however you want; but the rule is that it happens.

The foregoing would be all that's necessary for the topic, except that guns have a fraught history in comics. What they are differs drastically from time to time and title to title, ranging from little more than props that bad guys wave around for some reason to terrifying slay-devices which are faster and more deadly than anything else, including most super-powers, sometimes in the hands of anyone. So here are a few extra words about the bang-bang. (6)

These rules include nothing magic about "a gun!!" that transcends the ordinary meaning of Points. If you want "guns are deadly" in terms of real-world plausibility, then you already have it. Ordinary people have Defense 0, so they are at lethal risk from any ordinary attack which threatens 10 Body damage. More dice or even a single Advantage out of several available turn that risk into near certainty.

If you want a gun, or guns in general, to outweigh most super-powers, then the necessary Points increase accordingly: at least 60 Power Points in Blast, probably more, Modified with Severe, Piercing, and Destructive, supported by significant punch in Speed, Find Weakness, and special effects. The teeth-clenched squinting insta-killer observed among certain comics favorites is walking around with an extraordinary and, I might add, disproportionate Point total.

Regardless of whatever lethality you want to associate with guns, other relevant Modifiers for them and similar things include No Endurance and Burnout, to dramatize ammunition which might run out. That way, you get all the unexpected click-click and ducking around to reload that you're looking for without counting anything. If you want to pull the realism cord, then No Knockback can be included, but I've noticed that even the fervent proponents of realism still want bullets to knock people all around the place.

ALL SHAPES AND SIZES

The hero's appearance is a special effect, including fundamental notions as species, planet or dimension of origin, god (old or new), living vs. construct, or really anything about "type" of entity at all. The vague and generic human chassis for the rules is nothing more than the same convention in most science fiction and fantasy. So if your hero has a cluster of seven eyes and no other facial features, or is a meter tall as well as a nice shade of lavender, no rules need to reflect any of that unless you want them to.

These kinds of special effects can be hardened by turning any Power effect into an ongoing aspect of appearance and ordinary function. Common options include Always On and 0 Endurance, and Extra Limb and tweaks of Awareness fit in as well. Unusual Looks, however, is entirely optional, as comics are full of funny-looking aliens or whatever whom no one seems to mind, as well as others who are just barely off human-model but receive constant horrified or disapproving responses.

Then there are heroes who vary their shape and form, calling on a different profile of builds and concepts. The simpler kind of mutable heroes retain their Powers and other aspects as their shape and appearance is altered, sometimes drastically; they may look weird but are still "themselves." Size is the obvious example, with different concepts of giant-ness and itsy-bitsy-ness expressed mainly through different kinds of energy management. Another version is the "rubber body" concept, which appears in very different ways in the comics, reflected here in different point-totals for some combination of Stretching, Density Increase, Superleap, and, for those who like rebound attacks, Reactive Blast with High Impact. It may also get surreal with such things as Gliding, Growth, and Force Wall.

One superhero woman combined nearly all these concepts with the full range of size change from speck to airplane-seizing giantess plus stretching about. Instead of cartoony overkill, she was, in my eyes, at the top of the list of most admirable, thoughtful, and bad-ass heroes in comics. (7)

Another change isn't as drastic physically, but rather socially: altering one's appearance to another identity, typically to deceive, in "master of disguise" or "man of many faces" style. The Disguise Skill is the anchor for Images and Instant Change, as well as Invisibility tied to Stealth for finding unlikely moments or opportunities for being unnoticed. Other Power tweaks may emphasize disguising either away from one's own identity ("not me") or toward someone else's specific identity ("them").

If such a character has Unusual Looks, they can be nominally hidden as a special effect, but that doesn't stop them from getting their ordinary roll, which if tripped, includes spotting them in the first place as well as the typical response.

If a hero is even more changeable, based on actually transforming rather than re-shaping or looking different, then it may still be expressed as a special effect of Instant Change with no other Powers involved, if the different forms don't differ in their capabilities.

Before looking at constructions for when they do, Instant Change deserves some attention of its own. Its simplest form is to change clothes, but it may also apply changing one's entire appearance, whether to "my superhero self" or in service to the master-disguised concept described above. Most drastically, it can mean becoming a different person, creature, or even thing. Perhaps surprisingly, it's the same number of Points, appropriate to its use, regardless of how many forms or options are involved, so it could be a single "other me" or dozens, or even customizable ones.

A radical version involves changing into inanimate objects. If the point is actually to masquerade as the object, that's a version of the Disguise-centered construction above, and if its operating properties are important, that includes Powers with Adaptive Special Effects. If the transformation is so thorough as to become that object itself, then the mild form of Shutdown applies. Even more bizarrely, consider Usable on Others in its aggressive form in order to turn people into toasters or frogs, which include such things as Entangle or Shrinking, respectively, with added powerful Ego-based combinations for "You're a frog."

When the different form or forms include different profiles of Powers or Characteristics, then the Multiform Power Framework works best to organize them.

With this type of hero concept, the Multiform is usually pretty big. You can even allot the maximum possible Points into a Multiform and its Slots for entirely different versions of the hero. Do this by first assigning Points outside the Framework for any baseline they all share, which must include any Skills, regardless of whether the latter are conceived to be specific to a given form. All the other Character Points now become the Multiform's Pool and Slots. If any Limitation applies to the whole thing, figure out the math first so you know how many Active Points are available.

The versions may actually be different individuals, like a literal “alter ego,” or maybe you’re a portal for different dimensional warriors. To associate them with different personalities, organize several Psychological Situations accordingly. If you want to be uncertain about which one you get or become, make the Instant Change Tricky. And if you want to make one or more of them act unpredictably relative to the others, that’s Tricky as well, for the Framework as a whole.

Then there’s the opposite, to make more individual versions of yourself, which, in the comics, usually turns out to be not much of a power. If you’re going for the mob dogpile attack, then it works better as a Blast or Entangle with the Area Advantage, with all those grimacing versions of yourself as a special effect. If you do use a Multiform, then the Point structure does not allow you to get multiple and simultaneous full-power heroes for one hero’s Points. Instead it relies on the Separate Advantage with the option to provide the separated entity the independent range of action. You only need Multiform if the selves differ from one another in Powers or Characteristics. Variants in the comics include fully independent separate minds, full contact and integration via a single mind, and carefully-tuned intermediate concepts. (8)

REFERENCES

- (1) Ben Grimm, or the Thing, demonstrates strength as a function of emotional ties and determination, and applying it tactically, rather than simply out-hitting weaker opponents. He first appeared in *Fantastic Four #1* (1961), by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, published by Magazine Management using its Marvel Comics imprint.
- (2) Repeated heroes have demonstrated that being unequivocally strong enough to beat anyone or do anything is sooner or later dialed back for stories to be interesting. The standout example began with *Superman #233* (1971), by Dennis O’Neil and Curt Swan, published by Warner Communications using its DC Superman imprint, including drastically reducing the hero’s powers and removing vari-colored kryptonite as a central plot device. A similar effect occurred for the Hulk beginning with *The Incredible Hulk #331* (1987), by Peter David and Todd McFarlane, published by New World Entertainment using its Marvel Comics Group imprint. After this point the Hulk’s strength took second place to his cunning, and focused on suppressed fury rather than going berserk.
- (3) Most mind control in comics is binary: either it can’t be broken by its victim, or it can and is, upon sufficient effort. The most striking contrast, in which mind control relies upon and releases unconscious urges, is found in Mastermind’s control of Jean Grey, in her persona of the Black Queen and the creation of Dark Phoenix, in *The Uncanny X-Men #129-135* (1980), by Chris Claremont and John Byrne, published by Cadence Industries using its Marvel Comics Group imprint.

This interpretation characterizes many instances of mind control authored by Claremont.

(4) Doctor Strange is one of many similarly-themed and named heroes, but his comics most emphasized mystic, psychic, and psychedelic realms, beginning with *Strange Tales* #110 (1963), by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, especially while Ditko was credited for the plots, published by Magazine Management using its Marvel Comics imprint. This was also the central feature in *Marvel Premiere* #3-14 and *Doctor Strange* #1-2 and #4-18 (1973-1976), by Steve Englehart, Frank Brunner (*Marvel Premiere*), and Gene Colan (*Doctor Strange*), published by Cadence Industries using its Marvel Comics Group imprint.

(5) The list of “not a Focus” widgets includes but isn’t limited to Green Lantern’s ring, Wonder Woman’s lasso, Batman’s utility belt, Captain America’s shield, the Punisher’s guns, Green Arrow’s or Hawkeye’s bow, Spider-Man’s web-shooters, Iron Man’s armor, Thor’s hammer, Daredevil’s billy club, and more. The converse is demonstrated by the many armored villains who are reliably busted up, switched off, overloaded, or de-shelled as soon as the hero figures out how.

(6) Guns’ history in American superhero comics is inverted from its usual presentation: to have them is the default, not the exception, varying only in how often you shoot people. Early almost-comics pulp fiction and newspaper strips were all gun-heavy, including *The Shadow* and *The Phantom*, later with *The Spider*, and they never stopped, e.g. *The Executioner*, all of which include many imitations and have steadily provided content mined by radio, film, and TV. The first decade of the allegedly sweet-and-bright-eyed, so-called Golden Age of Comics was littered with corpses left by heroes, brought to a terrifying head with *The Spectre*. Special mention goes to the Captain Marvel movies – a festival of super-powered homicide – and to the take-no-prisoners women superheroes Fantomah, the Spider Queen, Black Fury/Miss Fury, Lady Satan, the Black Cat, the Black Widow, Liberty Belle, Ms. Victory, Miss Masque, the Phantom Lady, the Spider Widow, and the Woman in Red. The question isn’t why superheroes starting shooting people in the 1980s, but why they stopped for a while.

The historical points explain why, with a twist.

- In 1940, Batman shot a foe and hanged another from the Batplane. As part of Independent News’ policy of upscaling its image out of bootlegging and porn, the owners instituted an in-house code stipulating that heroes would not kill, that they would uphold the law, that authorities would be portrayed sympathetically, that black magic or horror elements could not be shown, and many similar rules. The superheroes they acquired, and especially their new organization into the Justice Society of America, took on a distinctive glossy, benign quality.

- In response to public pressure specifically on comics beginning about 1948, National Periodical Publications (now the name of Donenfeld's and Liebowitz's owning company) and Archie Comics instituted the Comics Code Authority, using the same code in 1954. Effectively, all newsstand comics had to "be" NPP in this regard, which is to say, about the same edge as you would find in "Goofus and Gallant" in *Highlights*, or they would not be distributed.
- In 1971, due in part to events in *The Amazing Spider-Man*, most of the Comics Code Authority stipulations were relaxed. Newsstand comics erupted with all manner of gunplay, surreal horror, and corrupt establishment figures, as well as a zoo of monster protagonists, essentially returning to normal.

Here's the thing: Batman missed his timing. In 1968, in the radically-changed editorial environment at DC Comics as NPP shifted to new ownership, ambitious writers Dennis O'Neil, Archie Goodwin, Frank Robbins, and Steve Englehart, working with skilled artists Neal Adams, and Bob Brown, restored the Batman (as they insisted on calling him) to his pulp roots ... except that the Code still held, and they had no reason to know that it would be downgraded so soon. They had to reconcile the lurking, ruthless, obsessive vigilante with Officer Friendly. Batman's weird psychology ever since stems from the resulting uneasy compromise.

This artifact, which could not have formed at any other point in comics history, persisted and underwent further examination with almost every hero written or overseen by O'Neil afterwards, especially his editorship of *Moon Knight* and *Daredevil*. It formed a new category between the default options, i.e., heroes who shot people vs. those who were strong or weird enough not to have to. Therefore guns for superheroes hold immense significance to comics fans far outweighing their role in other media.

The appearance of another character just after that shift shows what might have been. Creators at Marvel had been subverting the Code all along anyway and seemed ready for the new opportunity. Gerry Conway, among other grimness, introduced The Punisher in *The Amazing Spider-Man* #128 (1972), opening the door for firearms to proliferate across many new characters. Furthermore, since he was portrayed as unhinged as well as intelligent, the concept was harsher and edgier than the character's tough-talking but heroic depiction in the mid-1980s and afterwards.

(7) Although stretching heroes have been around since Plastic Man (*Police Comics* #1, 1941, published by Quality Comics), the most intense versions are the women. My reference is to Elasti-Girl who defied every convention of female protagonists in the 1960s. The powers concept was taken up a level in *Doom Patrol* #115-116 (1967), by Arnold Drake and Bruno Premiani, when her similarly stretchy enemy, Madame Rouge, was driven mad by competing mental demands, split into two, and fought herself (themselves?) with disturbing snakey stretches of any body section for several pages. A similar villain with a slightly more animal motif, Shapeshifter, first appeared in *Elementals* #1 (1984), by Bill Willingham, published by Comico. The latest heroic representative is Kamala Khan, Ms. Marvel, first appearing in *Captain Marvel* #14 (2013), by Kelly Sue DeConnick, Scott Hepburn, and Gerardo Sandoval, published by the Walt Disney Company in its Marvel Entertainment division.

(8) The typical copy-crowd hero or villain is Flashback, first appearing in *Alpha Flight* #1 (1983), by John Byrne, published by Cadence Industries using the Marvel Comics Group imprint. In issue #28 (1985), his disgruntled teammate Diamond Lil tells him, accurately, “All those tomorrow men of yours are good for is instant crowd scenes.”

Triplicate Girl, as she was originally named, presents a whole textbook for duplicating heroes’ possible fates and multiple deaths, being whittled down to one (Una) and ultimately “expanding” to nearly infinite (Duplicate Girl). She first appeared in *Action Comics* #276 (1961), by Jerry Siegel and Jim Mooney, published by National Periodical Publications using its Superman DC imprint. Each duplicate is independent until their memories are combined upon recombining. This is contrasted with the Engineer, or Angie Spica, who maintains a single mind throughout a considerable number of duplicates, who first appeared in *The Authority* #1 (1991), by Warren Ellis and Bryan Hitch, published by Aegis Entertainment using its Wildstorm Comics imprint. The Multiple Man, or Jamie Madrox, is similar to Duplicate Girl. He first appeared in *Giant-Size Fantastic Four* #4 (1975), by Len Wein, Chris Claremont, and John Buscema, published by Cadence Industries using its Marvel Comics Group imprint; with special mention as well to his appearances in *X-Factor* (1991-1993) by Peter David and Larry Stroman, published by Compact Video using its Marvel Comics Group imprint. Harem, or Daphne DeShantis, produces independently-acting duplicates who share their memories and new skills at recombination, but who also experience sensations and other effects while separate. She first appeared in the webcomic *Grrl Power* #59 (2011), by David Barrack.

