

GAMESMASTER SECTION

Gamesmasters, this section is for you! After we discuss a few aspects of Marvel that have probably come up in your campaigns, we've got a really great section called "Creating Your Own Adventures," the much-anticipated Adventure Generator that was originally intended to appear in the MURPG's official Spider-Man's Guide to New York. With the Adventure Generator in your hands, you'll find a fast and easy way to come up with a never-ending supply of exciting adventures with which to challenge your players! The last section features profiles for highly-trained agents of the various organizations that populate the Marvel Universe.

COMMENTS ON VENOM

The Marvel Universe Roleplaying Game prides itself on flexibility. It encourages players and GMs to tweak characters to make the best gaming session possible. One of the legitimate reasons to adjust character profiles includes a changing status quo in the comics, but the GM might also wish to modify a character to present more of a challenge to the heroes. Sometimes, however, you might want to adjust the character simply because you feel that it is somehow "lacking." Let's take Venom, for example. Here is a way to "fine-tune" his character sheet with only a few adjustments to his profile:

- Increase Eddie Brock's Strength to 3.
- Increase Venom's Durability to 4 and Energy to 12.
- Add two new Actions: Web-Slinging and Tendril Whip, both at 5.
- Add two options to Shape-Shifting: "Camouflage" and "Applies to clothing only."
- Add Toughness: (+1).

VILLAINS AND SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Recurring characters are the heart of every successful game campaign. Audiences love to see familiar faces, and game players are no different. Look for opportunities to re-use a character from a previous adventure. Need a reporter at a crime scene? Why not give her a name and a description, and have her show up on a regular basis? Before too long, the players will be seeking her out for information, and she'll become one of their favorite supporting characters.

Your favorite villains can make regular appearances, too. But how do you keep them alive for the next adventure?

- The Escape Route: A secret passage, a getaway jet, a teleporter, you name it.
- The Dummy: The villain dresses an unconscious hostage in his costume and escapes in the confusion.
- The Distraction: The villain puts a bunch of civilians in danger, then escapes while the heroes are saving them.
- Instead of getting killed, the villain can always get knocked out and arrested. Sooner or later, any villain can escape from prison.
- A son, daughter or protégé of the villain can take up the legacy.
- If all else fails, bring the villain back

from the dead, either through science, magic or cosmic force. Hey, you're in the comic books; it happens all the time.

Need a new villain in a hurry? Here's a trick: create the ultimate nemesis for a specific hero! Copy his or her profile and amp up the scores by a point or two all over. Suddenly, the hero is faced with a villain who can do everything she can, only better. Only quick thinking, good role-playing, and teamwork will save the day.

PLAYING WITH CHALLENGES

Challenges are more than just a way to get free stones. They can be a source for great role-playing, an opportunity for villains and even a springboard for new adventures.

The real fun of a role-playing game lies in acting out a situation as if you were actually a superhero, making tough choices while you take on the bad guys. If a hero has a compulsion to stick up for the underdog, make him choose between hiding in ambush for the bad guy or blowing his cover to help out a kid being hassled by a gang. Or, if a heroine won't break the law, let her know that she can get the object she seeks-- if she breaks into someone's house and steals it. And if a hero has conflicting interests between Asgard and Earth, stir up some trouble in both places and make him choose which one to protect. One of two things will happen: the player will ignore his challenge and the story will suffer, or else stick to his challenge and be forced to come up with another plan. Either way, he or she faces the same tough choices that crop up in Marvel comics.

You can also use challenges to help you create new adventures. If a hero has a haunted past, how about bringing a few skeletons out of the closet? Or if a hero has prying friends, how about making one of them a hostage of the bad guys? A hero who is susceptible to certain attacks (fire, sonics, etc.) is going to be a magnet for villains who specialize in that area.

Running out of new and interesting challenges? No problem. To make up your own challenge, decide how badly it affects the character. A minor challenge that doesn't have much impact should only be worth one white stone. A major challenge, which significantly affects the character, should be worth two stones. And a severe challenge should be worth three. You can add a stone if the challenge comes into play often; add two stones if it's a constant problem. Encourage your players to come up with their own challenges and then help them assign stones.

VIGILANTES AND THE PRESS

Everyone knows how *The Daily Bugle* treats Spider-Man. Vigilantes are constantly bashed by the press and sometimes sought by the police. But news reports can be a great way to motivate the players. For a good example, look at the news items in the adventure "We Live Here, Too!" contained in the Game Guide. Make up your own *Daily Bugle* headlines about the heroes' adventures, and share them during the game. A little bad press can motivate the heroes to show the world they're trying to do good. And the real payoff is the heartfelt thanks they'll get from the people they save. After all, isn't that what being a superhero is all about?



CREATING YOUR OWN ADVENTURES

Superheroes have many Adventures. It's part of what being a superhero is all about. This means, of course, you will need come up with new Adventures on a regular basis, just like the writer of a comic. It is not really enough to set up a "dungeon" and populate it with "monsters" for the players to wander around and "encounter." That's not the motivation of the standard comic book superhero (or supervillain either, for that matter). A superhero typically needs specific outside motivation to draw him forth into the cold, unsympathetic world. Maybe he's just on "patrol" and he spots something awry. Maybe a friend(s) is in trouble. Maybe his "boss" sends him on an "errand." But it's always something specific. Something out of the ordinary. This is a tool to help you come up with that "something" to cause your players to interrupt their normal routines, gather together and go out and-- adventure.

This is why we use the term "Mission" and have "Objectives." In other words, there is a— reason— the players start out on an Adventure and specific— goals— to accomplish, which the players may know from the start or will discover during the Mission itself.

If you have read the Adventure in the Game Guide (or in the X-Men or Avengers Guides), you'll know that we organize our Adventures into Issues, Missions and Scenes, and we devise "reasonable" Objectives for each Mission. To recap, most Issues comprise an entire Adventure (although some Adventures can run many Issues).

An Issue usually contains two to three Missions, and each Mission usually includes one to three Scenes each. This is can be varied, of course. Our first issue ("We Live Here, Too!") is fairly standard: Three Missions of 1 or 2 Scenes per Mission. On the other hand, our Issue in the Avengers Guide ("A Hulk Runs Through It") includes 9 Missions of one Scene each. In other words, the GM can vary the structure to fit the story he wants to tell.

So here is our system to help you design you own Adventures: rescues, desperate defenses, investigations,

opportunities, whatever kinds of stories you find in the comics and whatever you can come up with. We hope it helps you; we know it's helped us!

ADVENTURE ATTRIBUTES

This is how our Adventure Generator works: We will describe eleven things you should consider when you are designing an Adventure. Go through each of these eleven "menus" in order to decide what your Adventure is going to be like. You should carefully consider each item on each menu. As we proceed from step to step, we will show examples of how we use this tool to construct our Adventures, using our premiere Issue, "We Live Here, Too!" as an example.

When creating your own Adventures there are 11 menus to consider:

1. **WHO ARE YOUR PLAYERS?**
2. **WHAT DO YOU WANT TO HAPPEN?**
3. **WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES TO SUCCESS?**
4. **HOW DO YOU WANT IT ALL TO END?**
5. **WHERE DO YOU WANT THE ADVENTURE TO TAKE PLACE?**
6. **HOW LONG DO YOU WANT THE ADVENTURE TO LAST?**
7. **OUTLINING THE ADVENTURE**
8. **WHAT NPCS TO USE**
9. **MISSION OBJECTIVES**
10. **BACKSTORY / MISSION BRIEFING**
11. **KEEPING THE ADVENTURE ON TRACK**

MENUS

1. WHO ARE YOUR PLAYERS?

Even before you decide what sort of Adventure you want to offer, you need to consider who your players are. For example, a bank robbery or terrorist strike is probably not an appropriate Mission for heroes like the Avengers, but it would be for a group like the Master of Evil or the Acolytes. So you have to consider what may be appropriate for your own group of players. The question you need to answer for each hero is, "Why am I here?" Here are a few questions you need to ask yourself to arrive at that answer:

- a) Are your players heroes or villains?

Or neither or both? This is probably the first question you want to know about a comic hero: Is he a good guy or a bad guy or what? The answer to this question as much as any other factor determines what kind of Adventure you'll want to design: Good guys do things like rescues, crimefighting and defending the innocent. Bad guys do things like conquest, organized crime and terrorism. And the enigmatic types can go either way, but even they usually have some sort of prime motivation when it comes right down to it.

- b) You also need to ask yourself what sort of Adventures your players like. Many Marvel heroes do just as well fighting as negotiating (take Gambit, for example), and you will always need to consider the personal tastes of your players. Not that you have to cater to their tastes utterly, but if they are combat-mad, you should consider adding more good old violence, if they like to negotiate, you should provide appropriate opportunities to do so. And if they like to solve problems, put together clues, mysteries or "puzzles," you should try to include those elements as well. One of the truisms of all roleplaying games is that there's more than one way to skin a cat.
- c) How powerful are your heroes? Usually there will be enemies to deal with. Be it fighting, stealth or negotiation, the players need to be able to at least have a good chance against their enemies. But you don't want it to be a pushover, either. And you don't want to "punish" your more powerful players by merely matching them with foes of equal power. (This is an 'easy out' for the GM, but can be immensely frustrating for players and greatly increases resentment toward powerful players and unseemly interplayer rivalry. RPG veterans will recognize this problem well, of course.) The idea is to give the

powerful players at least a little extra advantage (while providing sufficient danger for all). This will tend to keep the weaker players from shuddering each time another player gains a bit in power.

- d) What are their interests and Challenges? This is as important a factor as whether your players are “good guys” or “bad guys.” A hefty percentage of comic books involve stories that dwell on the Challenges or particular interests of the heroes involved. For example, if your players include Reed Richards, it would be appropriate if the Adventure included, problems that inventing would solve, figuring out High tech, etc. Besides, Reed would probably be more interested in an Adventure involving his own expertise than, say, warring against Organized Crime (which would be more the domain of, say, the Punisher or Spider-Man). You should always keep the “Why am I here” question in mind.
- e) Are they a team or a group of individuals who do not normally operate together? If they are a team, it’s probably fairly straightforward. After all, team members are at least likely to have the same basic goals. If they are a collage of individuals, however, you have to come up with a good reason why each of the players get together and set out with a common goal.
- f) What makes sense to them as characters? A GM should always have an eye out as to what kind of Adventure “fits” with his players. This often arises from players’ Challenges and concerns. For example:
- Spider-Man will be interested in anything untoward occurring in New York and will be keeping an eye out to protect vulnerable family and friends.
 - Wolverine has made many enemies during his shadowy past who can be the catalyst to draw him into the Adventure. He also has a tendency to pick up vulnerable sidekicks, whom he has an interest to help out if they’re in danger.
 - If Doc Ock plotting something in NYC, you can bet Spidey and

friends would be interested in stopping him.

- If a group of fanatic mutant-haters are on the move, it would be an ideal job for the X-Men. Are the Masters of Evil on the move? Call the Avengers or Defenders. (Not that “crossovers” are not allowed.)
- g) How many players are going to be on the Adventure? We assume about a half-dozen players for the Adventures we have provided, but that can vary widely. Obviously, if you are going to run for only one or two players, the nature of the Adventure will be different. There may be less fighting (or fighting vs. weaker or less numerous foes) and more negotiation, stealth, etc. It all depends on the power, number and nature of your players.
- h) Are there NPCs among the players? You can make use of their personalities, motivations and Challenges as tools for your Adventure. And even more important, you can use them to guide (or mislead) your players and take the Adventure in the direction you have in mind (more on this later). For example, in our “A Hulk Runs Through It Issue” (Avengers Guide), Rick Jones serves as a primary guide throughout, and can be used to provide clues and direction as appropriate.
- i) Last but definitely not least are plot hooks. Any aspect can be a plot hook: Continuing or perennial storyline, previous Adventures, backgrounds, etc. Anything to connect the Adventure with your campaign as a whole. The Adventures we have already provided (Issues 1-3) are merely starting points: they can easily lead to a further, continuing Adventure. You had the same group on the last Adventure, so you don’t have to worry too much about how and why the players got together— you did that last time and the motives/issues will probably be much the same. And while players like fresh subjects, they also appreciate a degree of continuity, as well. (R drug sold to the military . . . ? Mission: Stop the test?)

Here’s how we dealt with it in our Issue

1: “WE LIVE HERE, TOO!”

a-b.) Players are heroes (ideally, X-Men). But this is only because we decided to do it that way. Had our players wanted to be the Brotherhood, we could have written it “inside out” so the players could be the Brotherhood or any other villainous group. The main thing is that you design your Adventures (or adapt the ones we provide) with your particular players, their proclivities and preferences in mind.

c.) Players are X-Men, but entry points are provided for NYC local heroes.

d.) Other than provisions for the play of Beast (his vast knowledge) and Jean Grey (her Telepathy), we really don’t go into that too much because we were designing the Adventure without a specific player-group in mind, to be useable by almost anyone. You, of course, may want to include stuff relevant to the particular characters in your campaign.

e.) They are a team (X-Men) and have the same basic goals.

f.) Dealing with mutants is prime territory for the X-Men.

g.) The issue is designed for roughly half a dozen players.

h.) This Adventure will accommodate NPCs in the group. Probably X-Men. The Beast would be an ideal addition if he’s not being played or there isn’t a player with similar powers along. He’d be easily available (especially if the players are X-Men). Note that we provide motives and “entry points” not only for the X-Men, but for the Punisher (motivated by Organized Crime issues), Spider-Man (motivated by NY crime as well as journalist assignments from J. Jonah Jameson) and others, as well.

i.) Since this is the very start of a new Adventure concept, it includes no plot hooks in the beginning, but we do provide a lot of potential for a continuing story regarding what happens to the R drug (will it “leak out?” or something?), How OsCorp will respond? What will Green Goblin do? And what about Dr. Felix? There is lots of plot-hook potential for continuing the Adventure.

All in all, this is one of the most important questions you may have to answer when starting to create an adventure. After all, it will set the whole tone and flavor of the Issue you create and any subsequent issues you might spin-off. In other words, what corner of the Marvel Universe will your very own Marvel series fill?

You will need to decide ahead of time whether or not you want to use the length and breadth of Marvel's universe or whether you will keep a tighter focus on just one corner of it. Some players enjoy a wide range of villains and locations, of heroes that happen to drift in and out of the adventure, and of other cameos from the comic books. Don't worry, however. There are thousands of stories that can be told with a more narrow focus. Perhaps all the players are mutants. They can be recruiters for the Xavier Institute, researching mutant activity at the start of each adventure. An even narrower focus might be that the players are all affected by Hammerhead of the New York Maggia crime family, and all adventures could center on gaining revenge and taking down the Maggia once and for all.

So how will your players fit into the greater scheme of the Marvel Universe? You might want to consider tapping into these very broad categories:

a) The Street-Level series. A perfect tone and scope if you're using this Guide book, the Street-Level series takes place entirely in New York City. There might be a reason to restrict activity to one location (Spider-Man needs the skyscrapers to swing across the city, after all), or it could just be that your heroes have taken up residence here. In any case, the majority of trouble facing heroes might be considered "low-level," like stopping bank robberies, crashing drug deals, rescuing mugging victims, and the like. More excitement will come from facing down city-wide threats like Maggia crime bosses, corrupt politicians, and villains that want to destroy or disrupt the city overall. You might think that you will be making a slight difference to the world overall, but sometimes helping individuals one-by-one is the most rewarding activity of all.

Keep in mind, of course, that heroes and villains have to be chosen appropriately. Spider-Man certainly fits



When choosing Spidey-villains, you can choose from a variety of personalities and motivations.

the bill, as does Daredevil, Cage, and Cloak and Dagger. The villains might range from Electro and Doc Ock to the Kingpin and the Green Goblin. Any individual hero should be able to handle three or four armed thugs on his/her own as well as stand up to a typical "average" villain one-on-one.

b) The Global series. While the city might be a good place to hold your headquarters, in this series New York City serves as a springboard for adventures around the world. These heroes are often called upon to defend the country, explore exotic locations, aid disaster victims, and, in general, prevent World War III. This series often features teams of heroes, like the Avengers, X-Men, and Fantastic Four. The heroes often command great power or are otherwise considered the mightiest on Earth in their chosen pursuit. They have to be—the villains that fit the scope of this series are the likes of Doctor Doom, the Leader, Magneto, the Red Skull, Ultron, and more!

New York City still features prominently even with a larger scope. Sometimes, these heroes still have to deal with the troubles of ordinary individuals, although it often becomes a plot hook to a scenario on a larger scale. Plus, this series features recurring NPCs that work best in New York. Think of the ambassador to a

troubled nation, a corrupt millionaire investor, and the high official of an international agency.

c) The Cosmic series. The largest possible scope for a Marvel series—it takes up the whole multiverse! These heroes get to explore strange new planets and other dimensions as well as defend Earth against invasion from the "other side." The ante is certainly upped in this campaign, since it might result in the destruction of the entire planet, if not the whole solar system! For heroes that want to participate in this type of series, you'll have to be powerful enough to handle cosmically-powerful villains such as Kang and Loki and an armada of Kree or Skrull soldiers. Heroes like Doctor Strange, Thor, and the Silver

Surfer fit this series best, although sometimes teams like the Avengers and Fantastic Four and even the X-Men find themselves in such situations.

2. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO HAPPEN?

What is the "main thing" going on on the Adventure. Is it a straightforward fight with obvious consequences. Or is it a subtle "wheels within wheels" sort of thing going on? Here is an extremely limited list of possibilities:

- a) Foiling a plot? This is one of the most commonly occurring themes in comic books:
- A plot to seize power of or destroy the Earth (the US, the Earth, the universe, what have you)
 - Blackmail
 - Robbery: Cash, gold, radioactive elements, advanced special equipment, military (or other) secrets, etc.
 - Assassination/murder
 - Revenge (E.g., The Lethal Legion is composed of villains whose primary motivation is to destroy the Avengers, who had thwarted them in the past. The same applies to the "Legion of Losers," who strongly desire to avenge themselves on its prime nemesis,

- Spider-Man.)
- “Outing” the secret identity of a superhero
- Discrediting of enemies in the eyes of the public, government, spouse, fellow team members, what have you
- Multiple effects: One thing leading to another. (Murder to enable Robbery to enable Blackmail to enable a plot to unleash a Demon on Manhattan and hold the UN for spiritual ransom?)

The usual pattern is that the heroes have to discover something suspicious is afoot (or someone tells them), discover the plot, prevent it from being carried out, and bring the miscreants to justice (or not).

- b) Rescue (perhaps someone the players would have second thoughts about rescuing). Hero is:
 - Held captive
 - Marooned
 - In extreme danger
 - Imprisoned
 - Entrapped
 - Brainwashed or mentally controlled
 - Imperiled by natural disaster (or maybe not so “natural”)
- c) Response to attack. Naturally, whether your Adventure involves preventing these attacks or carrying them out may depend largely on whether your players are heroes or villains . . .
 - Attack on an individual, team or location. This can be simple it can get elaborate: For example, in Under Siege, the Masters of Evil attack the Avengers Mansion intending to steal data from their secret files and reveal it publicly, thus causing embarrassment and loss of reputation to the Avengers)
 - Attack on Earth by aliens (such as the Kree)
 - Attack on a nation (e.g., Genosha)
 - Attempted Genocide (e.g., the Morlock Massacre)
- d) An opportunity arises (this is ideal for villainous player-groups):
 - An item is found that acts as a key or clue
 - A uranium shipment is due next week (or something similar)
 - A security chief on the take

- Some sort of one-time event giving a temporary window of opportunity to take advantage
- e) Something suspicious happens that warrants investigation: (This can in turn lead to any of the above situations, of course.)
 - Professor X or some other “group leader” sends the players out to do something
 - Something heroic or villainous?
 - Something the players cook up for themselves? (“Let’s rob a bank! Let’s start a business! Let’s find my long-lost brother! Let’s Get Kraven! Whatever . . .)

Cases “a” and “e” apply to “WE LIVE HERE, TOO!” Initially, it’s something suspicious (news of a new drug on the street) that warrants investigation. At least in Prof. X’s opinion, which is why he sends a team of players to investigate. After initial investigation, it turns out that there is a nefarious plot afoot, courtesy of Green Goblin and OsCorp. The players need to foil this plot and shut down the drug operation in order to “succeed” in the Adventure.

3. OBSTACLES

An adventure isn’t an adventure without some complications! Heroes need something to test their mettle; villains need something, too. And rarely does any plan go off without a hitch.

- a) NPCs: Villains (or heroes), Individuals, Groups, Government organizations, etc.
- b) Situations: A mountain to climb, a vault door to get through, the Sphinx demanding answers to riddles, whatever.
- c) Things to figure out, including, “Who’s the good guy anyway,” and similar questions, and misunderstandings. You know, situations where your players need to put together clues learned so far during the Adventure. Sometimes heroes wind up fighting each other or helping those who turn out to be enemies.
- d) Red herrings, blind pathways: Just in case the players are getting too complaisant and think it’s getting too easy to solve stuff, you can throw in a false clue or two to throw them off. (You should also provide a way for the players to find out the clue is false. Especially if “player-

hubris” may cause them to pass over or ignore said clue.)

- e) Moral Dilemmas and Strategic Decisions that may affect the Mission. Potential betrayal, powerful temptations, overriding concerns or fixations, potentially disastrous priorities, honor among thieves, ulterior motives [That voluptuous elf maiden-- she’s using you. She doesn’t really like hairy toes.] , band-of-brothers, Noblesse Oblige, selling out, buying in, buying happiness, buying off unhappiness, going out in a blaze of glory, and last, but not least, (insert favorite cliché). Moral dilemmas often occur when deciding which course of action to take.
- f) Dual methods: It’s usually better to avoid problems that can only be solved one way or that require a single power to solve it that your players might not even be capable of. For example, your players may need to get through that aforementioned vault door. They can smash it, learn the combination or get hold of someone who can open it and convince (coerce?) them to do so. Or maybe they need to get past a guard, in which case they can either find out the password or else simply try to evade or ice the guard.

We use most of these obstacles during our “WE LIVE HERE, TOO!” Adventure:

For “a,” the Adventure has plenty of villains. Besides the gang selling the R drug, there are a collection of villains attempting to thwart the players, namely The Brotherhood, Bullseye, Green Goblin, and OsCorp’s mutated goons. As for “b,” situations to overcome (aside from the fighting), there is getting past OsCorp security, recovering Dr. Felix, and obtaining samples of the R drug.

c.) The players need to find out where the R drug is coming from. In order to do this they have to figure out who knows the info, how to get the info and then put the pieces together in order to know where to go next.

d.) An ideal place for red herrings and false or misleading clues is (naturally) the Daily Bugle Headlines. Our drunk in the warehouse in Mission 2 is a good example of an NPC that will provide false (or irrelevant) clues.

e.) Will the players try to use the drug themselves? Steal the secret and exploit

it? Sell the secret to the Brotherhood for a hefty price? Ignore the problem and let it get out of hand (a very common moral dilemma for superheroes)? Or will they do the right thing and turn the drug over to Professor X so he can develop an antidote?

f.) For example, we provide a number of different solutions for the players to get past OsCorp Security: Using tech expertise, Black Ops or thieving. The other is to lay low and simply let the Brotherhood do that, then join in the fun. Also, some of our playtesters found other logical methods to follow different trails from the street dealers to the OsCorp plant.

4. HOW DO YOU WANT IT ALL TO END?

- Crush the players (maybe kill some)? You can hit the players with some really nasty stuff. Or you can use a weaker force to ambush the players. It's customary to provide an opportunity for the players to back down, escape or evade, but it's amazing how eager some players can be for punishment. And if they must insist on taking lumps, it's your job to accommodate.
- Give the players a mild workout? Sometimes you will want to make it easier on your players. Especially if they are new to Roleplaying Games and/or the MURPG system.
- How "large" are the stakes? What's at stake and other issues. Save the world? A familiar theme, but the GM has to consider the consequences should the players fail. Save the USA, New York, or a foreign country? Save an individual? Another common goal-set. Of course, you have to adjudicate things should the players fail. So if you don't happen to want to end the world if the players fail, you should have some excuse ready as to why that doesn't happen.

- Consequences of failure: Can range from nothing to the end of the world (and worse), depending on how large the stakes are. Bear in mind, that it might turn out that the stakes are not as large as the players have been led to believe. For example, if they fail to "save the world," it's possible that the world won't actually come to an end. Maybe someone else "offscreen" winds up saving it. Or the world gets messed up, but not destroyed (with possible plot hooks giving the players an opportunity to set things right). Even the GM never knows how it's going to turn out—players come up with unexpected twists all the time and the GM needs to roll with the punches. Remember that you as GM are effectively a god and therefore *deus ex machina* solutions are not out of order. ("You wake up and find it's all a bad dream," might be a little extreme, but you get the idea.)
- What potential "rewards" do you want to make available? How many Lines? Money? Future goodwill of favors? Getting in good (or bad!) with powerful NPCs? Any special

items and/or equipment? In MURPG (as in the comics) we do not tend to slather a player with special equipment or dozens of "magic items" to the extent that most players are mainly a cacophony of equipment. Not that we are averse to said items, but we prefer to put more emphasis on the characters themselves rather than their "things." This is, of course, a matter of personal taste, but we prefer to go with what is more typical in the actual comics: Some characters rely on items, but this is more the exception than the rule. You may see it differently, but in any event, it's a factor you'll have to consider.

Considering "a" and "b," in our "WE LIVE HERE, TOO!" adventure we are merely giving the players a bit of a workout. There are a couple of serious scraps, but the opposition is not overwhelming. It's the first Adventure we provide, so we're not really looking to crush and kill the players. It's possible players will die, but not terribly likely.

For "c," the fate of the Earth is not at stake, here. Even saving Dr. Felix is optional (not a bad thing, but not required). If the players fail, though, they will doubtless be contending with R-enhanced enemies in future Adventures.

d.) If the players fail, the R drug will reappear and cause problems. OsCorp will be free to sell the drug to the military, for one thing. The Kingpin will probably get his fingers into the equation as well, and the streets of NY will be less safe if the R drug is widely distributed illegally.

e.) Generally speaking, there are two or three Objectives per Mission and two or three Missions per issue. In "WE LIVE HERE, TOO!," players can gain lines for 8 Objectives (3 Primary, 3 Secondary 3 and 2 Bonus). In addition, they might steal some of the R drug (a moral dilemma) for their own purposes. If someone thinks to grab an OsCorp computer hard drive, they might get some mileage out of any info on it. There is not a lot of "treasure"



Want to try exotic locales? Hook up with Silver Sable, international mercenary.

to be gained, but cleaning the streets of the R drug will make future Adventures easier, and fulfilling the Objectives will please Prof. X, which also will be helpful in the future. Not to mention, you get more Lines for successful completion of Mission Objectives.

5. WHERE DO YOU WANT THE ADVENTURE TO TAKE PLACE?

Bear in mind that you may well need to make a rough map of each location. This can be especially important to players skilled in Acrobatics, Web-Slinging, Wall-Crawling, etc.

- a) How many places (locales)? This can vary very widely and relates to how long you want the Adventure to take. Some Adventures occur all in a single place (such as the X-Men Mansion). Others can occur on different places on earth, planets, even different dimensions and/or timelines.
- b) All on Earth? Locations include Wundagore, Latveria, Genosha, Savage Lands, NYC, USA, Russia, specific cities, capitals, etc. There are a number of “Marvel-specific” locations, but Marvel Adventures occur all over the world, frequently in “real-world” locations. Not to mention specific favorites such as the Avengers Mansion or the UN.
- c) Outer space or other dimensions/realities: Asteroid M, Limbo, Dr. Strange’s various stomping grounds, etc.
- d) In ships/bases (spaceships, aircraft, etc.) A Quinjet, Shi’ar starship, the Blackbird.
- e) The Moon: The Blue Area, Uatu the Watcher, The Supreme Intelligence of the Kree, etc.
- f) Other planets: Z’nox, Broi (homeworld of the Tsiln), Contraxia, Kymeliattia, etc.
- g) Alternate timelines? Likely to involve Kang, Immortus, the city of Chronopolis, “Historical” settings, etc.

Our “WE LIVE HERE, TOO!” adventure involves four different locations, all in NYC: We provide a map for each location: A high school and surrounding area under the West Side Highway, a midtown goth club, a nearby warehouse, and an OsCorp chemical plant. Your maps need not be as elaborate or as detailed as ours, but it doesn’t hurt

to have a good idea as to the physical surroundings.

Our “Unrest Underground” adventure (X-Men Guide) also is set exclusively in NYC, although it occurs mostly in the Morlock tunnels under the city. It involves five different location maps, mainly underground tunnels and complexes. All of the locations are real. 9th Ave. is where the world have gotten the goat’s head. There really is an Armory at 68th St., and there really is a sealed platform at 63rd St. And the Alley comprises some of the most tragic lore in all the annals of Marvel. The Marketplace is our own, but the Farmer’s Market overhead in Union Square actually exists. (Even the eternally cursed 2nd Ave. Subway project is real.)

Our “A Hulk Runs Through It!” adventure (Avengers Guide), however, involves Scenes all over the earth as well as the Blue Area of the Moon, all set in past or future times. Not only does it not occur in one city (or even one planet), but it involves time travel spanning over 3000 years, interspersed with intervals traveling through the space-time continuum during which time the players can interrelate.

6. HOW LONG DO YOU WANT THE ADVENTURE TO LAST?

- a) Scale: How powerful are the players and NPCs. How tough is the world? What’s the chance that a typical player is going to survive and prosper? How quickly do you want your players gain power? Adventures involving highly powerful players frequently take longer to run, and you need to consider that. So if your players’ characters are complex and powerful it may be wise to limit the overall number of Scenes.
- b) Scope: Is your Adventure confined to one particular location? Does it occur on Earth or elsewhere? Is time or space travel involved? Magic or the supernatural? Some campaigns are designed to deal strictly with specific locales or milieus and concerns. For example, a Marvel Knights Adventure would tend to be more limited in scope than a campaign dealing with many planets or such characters as Thor, Silver Surfer or even the Beyonder or Galactus, etc.

- c) How does it unfold? Will the players know pretty much what’s going on from the beginning? Or will they find out during the Adventure itself (and if so, what is it that causes them to go on the Adventure in the first place)? We personally find that it is fun for the players to figure out what’s really going on during the course of the Adventure— and surely, this is typical of comic book plots. But sometimes it’s all quite straightforward, and the players pretty much know what’s going on from the start. We suggest that you accommodate your players’ tastes, but vary it so that they always need to keep their eyes and ears (etc.) open just in case things turn out different than they seem.
- d) How many Missions? If you want a short, sharp Adventure that can be finished in a couple of hours, make the entire Adventure a single Mission. Our New Mutant’s Eve Adventure (published in *Inquest Magazine*, April 2003) is single-Mission. But a typical Issue will consist of at least two or three Missions, often involving some sort of change of venue.
- e) Leads to a multi-Adventure quest? Ongoing or Perennial? Can it be “delayed” for other tasks? Can others “join in” in the middle?

Our “WE LIVE HERE, TOO!” Adventure comprises 5 Scenes and is designed to last around 3 or 4 hours. Typically, you’ll have to count on around a half hour to set up and tend to your players’ requirements before beginning. Missions that involve a lot of fighting generally (but not always) take a little longer, so you should account for that. We figure a rough average of about a half-hour to an hour per Scene. Naturally, this can vary widely!

7. OUTLINE

Weave it all together. Put it all in the proper order. This is when you may well find certain contradictions, inconsistencies and loose ends.

- a) What is the “point” of each of your Scenes? There should be a reason for every Scene in your Adventure. Maybe there’s an obstacle to be overcome. Or a clue to be discovered. Or friends (or enemies)

- to be discovered. Yes, an encounter can occur merely because the players stumble into it, but there should be something to be gained/lost/learned, etc., in every Scene. It also keeps your players in the game.
- Is there more than one possible “logical pathway” to achieving the objectives? Can you “get there” by stealth, negotiation, figuring out a puzzle or just by brute force?
 - Do they lead logically to the Scenes that follow?
 - Tie up any loose ends. Make sure they are not too contrived, they make sense, and are true to the characters, NPCs, and situations involved.

Our “A Hulk Runs Through It!” adventure (Avengers Guide), however, involves Scenes all over the earth as well as the Blue Area of the Moon, all set in past or future times. Not only does it not occur in one city (or even one planet), but it involves time travel spanning over 3000 years, interspersed with intervals traveling through the space-time continuum during which time the players can interrelate.

Here’s the rough outline of “We Live Here, Too!”

Intro: X-Men Mansion (or alternatives for non X-Men). Prof. X briefs the players.

Mission 1: Find who is distributing the R drug and break up the local operation.

Scene 1: High School (Leads players to West Side Highway)

Scene 2: Drug Dealers (under the West Side Highway) lead the players to the warehouse district.

Mission 2: Find out where the R drug is being manufactured.

Scene 1: Warehouse district/Drug haven (Leads players to Club Noir).

Scene 2: Club Noir/Harris “The Boss” (Leads players to the OsCorp plant)

Mission 3: Shut down the operation and get the specs on the R drug to the Professor.

Scene 1: OsCorp plant (Leads to possible further Adventures).

Meanwhile, back at the ranch: We had to figure what would happen “offscreen”



between each Mission. We made sure that the sequence of events made sense, that the players would have time to heal up, make any necessary dropoffs, etc., and that this would all make sense within the context of what’s going on. Also, since it involves the discovery of information, mostly from non-powerful NPCs, we figured in a way to throw a wet blanket on the telepaths (via the R drug, as it happens).

8. WHAT NPCs TO USE?

Consider well the motivations you are putting into place: Why is an NPC there? (“Why am I here?”) How will he relate to the other players? Is he there to fight the players, give the players info (correct or not) or even join them (for good or ill)?

When appropriate, especially when relevant to the specifics of the Mission, you should make a specific note as to the likely behavior of the NPC.

Keep the NPCs “in character.” If you are going to play Marvel “accurately,” try to be true to its cast of characters. For example, it’s out of character if Wolverine chickens out or Beast is prone to making stupid misjudgments. Your players may well be Marvel fans and they will naturally expect the

heroes and villains they encounter to behave in the same general manner as they would in the comics. Your very choice of NPCs will be often prove a clue to the players. (Who you gonna trust? Spidey or Doc Ock?) For an NPC’s or team’s attitudes and likely behavior, see the Team Generator in the X-Men and Avengers Guides for a how-to and a whole bunch of examples.

a) Do your players need help and/or direction? Do they know what they need to know, but have not yet put it all together? Are they “almost there”

but don’t realize it? Or are they genuinely lagging behind in figuring out what’s going on and could use a hint or two to get them into the “right way” of thinking? An NPC they meet or one that is already a member of the party might provide hints.

b) Extras: NPCs who would be there “naturally.” If the Adventure takes place in a school, you’d probably see kids and teachers. Such “normal” NPCs can be ideal conduits for providing the players with information and hints. You may be able to learn where/when you are by such observation if you are badly “lost.” (E.g., if you see a

bunch of half-naked laborers building a pyramid, you might well infer that you're back in Ancient Egypt.)

- c) **Fight/Negotiate:** Sometimes players can negotiate and gain the help of others, even of sworn enemies, if the cause is sufficiently drastic (such as saving the earth). But sometimes the players need to fight it out, typically (but by no means exclusively) with guards protecting whatever the players are after or who are "blocking further progress". Or they may just get jumped. There may be other sneaky ways around such of ungentlemanly conduct (involving Black Ops, Invisibility, Phase Shift, Teleportation (etc.), or opportunities for fast-talking (especially for a solo player).
- d) **Help:** Either in the form of a strong-arm, a helpful hint, an enlightening observation, or even opportunity for escape or rescue.
- e) **Info:** Specific to the Mission Objectives, or not. Of course, the info can turn out to be a vital clue, merely a helpful hint or even a red herring.
- f) **Pieces of the puzzle:** Someone who has a specific piece of information that is important for the players in order for them to pursue their Mission Objectives. May be someone who has info that when combined with what the players have learned will make it obvious what the players have to do next. (Or perhaps just security personnel with top secret clearance and governmental computer access...)
- g) **Refer to the Team Generator** to adapt any superheroes/villains you need. Use the eight questions above for creating teams to provide them with the motives (which in turn derive from the story).
- h) **Perspective:** As always, take into account how powerful your players are, either as individuals or as a group when using existing NPCs or adapting/making them up. We've said this before, but it bears repeating.

Further words of wisdom:

- Don't overscript. It will tend to restrict your options and fluster you

when the players refuse follow said script. (Just recycle what you don't use, as always.)

- If you want to use the same Adventure for different groups of players rather than the Adventure was originally intended, you should be prepared to bump up (or down) the Abilities (especially Durability), Actions, Modifiers, and/or weapons of your "fighting" NPCs. For example, in "We Live Here, Too!" you might make Harris or "The Duke," the Club Noir bodyguards, or the OsCorp bananas more powerful, but not necessarily the security guards, cops, kids, the drunk, and other "normal human" non-combatants that are placed there not to fight, but to impart information, clues and atmosphere.
- This is an ideal time to turn to the Team Generator (X-Men and Avengers Guides) You'll find a myriad of teams and individuals to make use of in your Adventure. You can use them "straight," or you can use them to adapt your own teams and heroes/villains.

We provide NPCs to cover all of these provisions. In the intro, Prof. X shows up to assign the Mission and give the players direction. Sure, he's a powerful dude, but that's irrelevant because all he's doing is giving the players the Mission briefing.

In Mission 1, Scene 1, we have a teacher some kids and three security guards. They're there to provide info, not to fight. Their likely behavior is noted with their statistics. They're just extras we made up to fit the Scene, and the most important thing about them is the notes on their potential behavior. It's all boils down to mostly an exercise in Social Skills. By the way, the Teacher and the Security Guards are (mostly) red herrings; it's the kids who actually have the info the players need.

In Mission 1, Scene 2, we throw in some light opposition: some non-powerful mutant drug-dealing goons. They need to get a sample of the drug and find out who's supplying it. It may well involve a light workout, but maybe not. If the players want to fight, they can, but it's possible to achieve their Mission 1 Objectives without resorting to force.

Mission 2, Scene 1 features more Mutant dealers, but then the Brotherhood shows up (Blob, Mystique, Sabretooth

and Toad, who are after the R drug themselves) and the players get their first big fight. They aren't there to give the players info, just to beat on them. Bullseye (on the orders of the Kingpin) shows up, as well, and takes pot-shots at the players.

In Scene 2, they also encounter violence, but the foes aren't as tough as the Brotherhood. They are mostly "extras," (such as the drunk) except for "The Duke," but they are mostly there to beat info out of rather than to engage in major combat.

In Mission 3 (only 1 Scene), there is a combination of less powerful fighting NPCs (Security and Mutant guards), a powerful fighting group (the Brotherhood, with the Green Goblin joining in), and a weasely (and highly vulnerable) professor with vital data (one Dr. Felix).

9. MISSION OBJECTIVES

You now know enough to determine appropriate Mission Objectives. You can have more than three Objectives per Mission, but we generally recommend that the pattern be that there is always a Primary Objective, usually a Secondary objective and frequently a Bonus objective as well.

Normally, a player receives 1 to 5 Lines per play session, and this is based heavily (although by no means exclusively) on Mission Objectives. So if you feel success warrants a lot of Lines, you can "go heavy" on the number of Objectives. Likewise, if you feel the particular Adventure should not provide too many lines, you can restrict the number of Objectives. All you really need is a Primary. Most Missions come with a Secondary Objective, but this is by no means required. Bonus Objectives are "extras" at the discretion of the GM. Don't strain to come up more Objectives than the situation warrants; make their inclusion logical.

- a) **Primary Objectives:** Each Mission gets one Primary Objective. Generally speaking, failure to complete the primary Objective means that the Mission is an overall failure (unless otherwise specified). Primary Objectives should be relatively simple, straightforward and obvious from the general context of the Adventure.
- b) **Secondary Objectives:** These are important to the Adventure and

failure/success in completing them usually affects its course. (There is normally only one Secondary Objective per Mission, but this is not a rule carved in stone.)

- c) Bonus Objectives: You don't need to complete a Bonus Objective to succeed in the Mission. Success or failure to do so may lead to plot hooks and consequences during future Adventures, however.
- d) Overall Success or Failure of the Adventure. How many Mission Objectives do the players have to fulfill in order to regard it as a success? Which Objectives can they fail to meet but still succeed overall? Did the players find some brilliant way of satisfying the situations while failing the Objectives, some way that the GM didn't think of?
- e) False Objectives: On rare occasions, Objectives can be "secret" or "false," or can actually change (or be suddenly revealed) during the course of play. For example, in "A Hulk Runs Through It!" it is a BAD thing to complete the original Objectives. Very, very bad, indeed! And a major part of the Adventure is finding that out and discovering what the true Objectives are.

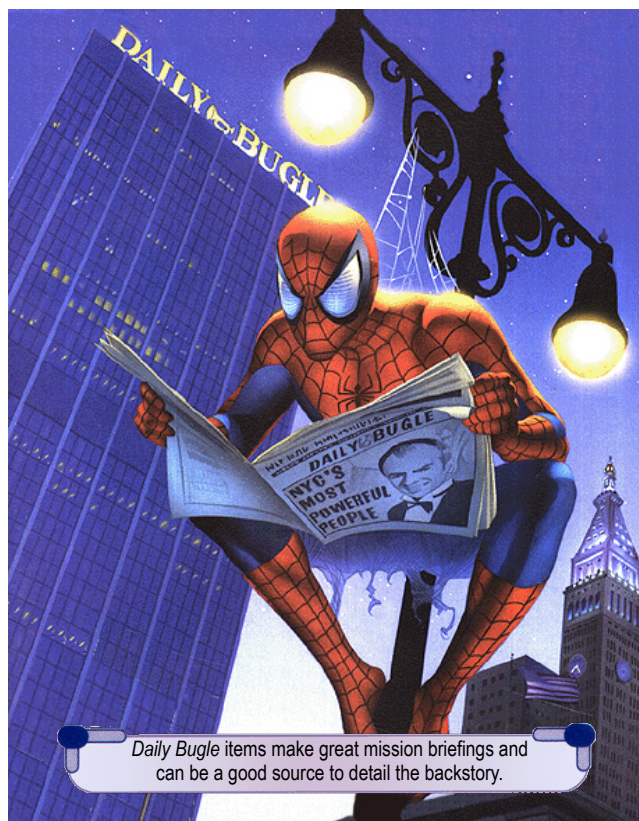
Let's explore the Mission Objectives in Issue 1: "WE LIVE HERE, TOO!"

Mission 1 Primary Objective: Find out where the people are getting the R drug.

Secondary Objective: Cut off the supply of R at the street level.

Bonus Objective: Get a sample of the R drug so somebody can fabricate a cure and undo the mutations.

Well, this Mission is a little "Objective-heavy," perhaps, but it is intended to introduce new players and get them off to a good start. The Primary Objective is obvious: Fulfilling it provides the necessary info to proceed to Mission 2. The Secondary Objective involves solving the proximate problem. While it's not necessary to complete it to continue the



Adventure, it is obviously highly desirable. The Bonus objective is an "extra." Good to complete, but not necessary. If the players fail to complete it, they will miss out on a Line, but will have opportunities to put things right, later on. (Besides, the street sample of the drug will be too diluted for proper analysis, anyway.)

Mission 2 Primary Objective: Find the next link in the supply chain of ReNew.

Secondary Objective: Find out who is the ultimate source of ReNew.

Bonus Objective: None (not all Missions need to have a Bonus Objective).

Again, the Primary Objective is obvious and it leads the players to the OsCorp chemical plant featured in Mission 3. You need to complete the Primary in order to proceed. As for the Secondary, it's desirable but not absolutely necessary to ID who is behind it all. But the main thing is to find where the drug is coming from. Of course, if they find out Green Goblin is behind it, the players won't be as likely to be ambushed when Goblin makes his sudden appearance mid-way through the final confrontation in Mission 3. There is no Bonus Objective for this Mission.

Mission 3 Primary Objective: Shut down the production of ReNew and keep the Brotherhood from obtaining the

secret.

Secondary Objective: Obtain a sample of the pure drug essence (unavailable in previous Missions) so a formula can be fabricated to undo the mutations. (Dr. Felix's laptop can provide this info, but a pure sample makes it quicker and less uncertain, so grab that as well, if you can.)

Bonus Objective: Get hold of Dr. Felix (or his laptop) and take him into custody.

Completion of the Primary Objective is clearly the main priority, but in this case the Secondary is obviously fairly important as well. The Bonus Objective (as is frequently the case) involves ancillary concerns such as bringing the guilty to justice.

10. BACKSTORY/ MISSION BRIEFING

- Compile all that you've done. Once you lay it all out, you will be able to pick out the inconsistencies and deal with them.
- Determine what the players know at the outset. Sometimes they know all they ever need to. More frequently, however, the Adventure is a process of discovery as to what's really going down. But you need to know what's going on behind the scenes. The players only see part of the picture, but you, as GM, see it all. And it's all got to fit together.
- Daily Bugle Items, Tish Tilby reports, and other hints/diversions. The players should be able to pick up an idea of what's at stake. And, obviously, it has to be something compelling enough for the players to go on the Adventure in the first place.
- How/why are the players gathered together? Do they all start out in the same place (such as the Avengers Mansion), or do some of them "show up" independently? If they are a team with a "father figure" such as Professor X, Reed Richards, or Magneto, it's likely they will have briefed the players on how to

start off and give some indication of what he expects of the players.

- e) Make sure the NPCs that you use have a logical reason for being there at that time. It's all very well to say "The Masters of Evil shows up," but why here? And why now? Some players, frankly, don't give a damn about such things, but the more thoughtful will always prefer that your story makes sense.

Here's some backstory for previous adventures:

a-b.) In *We Live Here, Too* all the players know is that there is a new drug on the street. They don't know at the outset about Norman Osborn's involvement nor do they know the Brotherhood and Kingpin's errand-boys are hot on the trail as well. They find this out during the course of the Adventure, and don't find out the whole story until Mission 3.

c.) Where appropriate we like to use *The Daily Bugle*, as a vehicle for providing info at the start of an Adventure, especially if the Adventure is set in NYC and involves something noticeable by the public. It's not always appropriate, of course, but we make use of the Bugle when it makes sense. Daily Bugle items are a good way to provide indirect hints as to what's going on. Of course the Bugle often (usually?) gets the story somewhat wrong, but there are useful tidbits to extract. These can serve as the catalyst for the Adventure. But don't expect to get the straight dope from the Bugle— one of the "main themes" of that paragon of journalism is that they usually get it wrong, or at least put a highly prejudiced spin on the events they report.

d.) In "We Live Here, Too!" our base assumption is that the players are X-Men, and that means they can be conveniently gathered in one place to start out the Adventure as well as instruction from Prof. X. So we set the "Mission Briefing" in Prof. X's Mansion. Now, "Mission Briefings" are not strictly necessary. In fact if the players are not X-Men, they won't be getting any— they will have to have made sense of the Daily Bugle reports in order to know that they have to go to the High School (in which case, the players can meet outside the High School and make their plans). So we also provide logical entry points for non-X-Men, in

which case they don't get an "introduction," but run into each other at the High School in the first Scene. You have to adapt this to the circumstances of your players, and this, of course, can vary widely. Sometimes it's less flexible, though: In "A Hulk Runs Through It," the players have to have some excuse for being at the Avengers Mansion at the outset, and it may not be easy for the GM to allow other players to "join in" once the Adventure is under way.

e.) Logical placement of NPCs: For example, why does the Brotherhood show up in Mission 2, Scene 1 (as opposed to, say, the Masters of Evil)? Because it makes sense. Magneto would naturally have a particular and special interest in any drug that causes mutations. Mutants have always been of very special interest to him: He's even been involved in a plot or two to mutate humanity, himself. And since the news is beginning to leak out about the drug, it is logical that the Brotherhood would be investigating at this time. So it makes perfect sense that Magneto would be sending a team to check out the phenomenon— just as Xavier is doing.

11. KEEPING THE ADVENTURE ON TRACK

You don't want to force the events artificially, but a little steerage can go a long way. NPCs are ideal in this role.

- Keep the players going from Scene to Scene so that it all connects.
- "Clues": Like NPCs put into place to move the players along. Sometimes there are more, sometimes fewer. But you can always throw in more if you need them (but try to be logical about it).
- Keep the players moving in the direction that you want them to go. What do you do to keep the players "on track" and what if they insist on "straying?" If the players "go outside the lines," or do something unexpected, how do you adjust? How do you "bring them back" to what you have planned— and do you even want to do this? Well, it's all a matter of personal style. Sometimes the players will come up with things you never dreamed of. And, likewise, they can (at the same time) remain utterly obtuse to clues you thought would be obvious.

The important thing is to keep

the Adventure moving. This is not to say you have to be overweening or spoon-feed the answers to your players, but it does mean that you should at least give them a fair shot at heading in the right direction. If they prove perverse in their insistence to go "off-track," it may be wise to let them do so. It is not necessary that your players succeed in every Mission or even Issue. In fact, some of the best, most enduring plot hooks stem from failed Missions

- d) Deus ex machina solutions: An NPC shows up and gives the players the magic password (or whatever). Once again, try to have this make sense in the context of the Adventure. For example, if you're lost in Limbo, Dr. Strange might pop in and help out.

Using "We Live Here, Too!" as an example:

a.) All you have to remember is that the players need to follow the R drug "up the chain" to its manufacturing source. If the players fail to connect the (rather simple) dots, you can always insert additional NPCs or circumstances that will lead them to the next "higher-up."

b.) If, for example, the players are making a mess of the first Mission, you might, say, drop in a student having a bad reaction to the drug, who will spill the beans . . . That way, even if the players miss out on completing Objectives, they can still proceed to the next Mission. Maybe they won't earn as many lines as if they had figured it out themselves, but at least you've kept them on track.

c.) You can prod your players to stay within the Mission parameters. Usually that's what they want to do anyway. But sometimes they will insist on going off in wild, unrelated directions. If that's what they really, truly want, it's probably for the best just to let them. They may well miss out on lines for Mission Objectives, and it's altogether likely that the Issue will prove a failure, with potentially bad consequences. But if that's what they really want, well, just let them. Remember, you can recycle any part of the Adventure they missed out on for another day.

d.) You've just got to roll with the punches (and never let 'em see you sweat). For example: One of our

playtesters (playing Storm) convinced the R drug dealers she wanted to make a “big buy” and got access to the higher-ups by that means, rather than by following the path we laid down. Players will often surprise you with innovative solutions. Don’t overscript your story to the extent that you can’t accommodate the unexpected good play of your players. You need to remain flexible and provide alternatives, and even then you can expect the unexpected.

MANAGING PLOT HOOKS

Let’s say that you’ve created a great Adventure, one that serves as an origin of a new team of superheroes. Maybe you’ve already had a series of adventures with your players, using the Issues of the various Game Guides. It might be time to spice up the regular flow of action with a plot hook. It’s a recurring subplot that targets one or more of your players, something that intrudes on your hero’s life but can’t be resolved right away—at least not in the course of the current Issue. Ongoing subplots happen all the time in the comics, and you might find your players eager for the suspense and chomping at the bit as they anticipate the next gaming session! The best plot hooks are situations that highlight an ongoing struggle (either an internal or external conflict) or foreshadow of some future event. Here are ways to sprinkle plot hooks into your adventures:

a) A sudden appearance: A mysterious package arrives on the doorstep, a piece of code appears in the mail, strange photos are sent via e-mail, or a shadowy figure lurks just out of sight. The

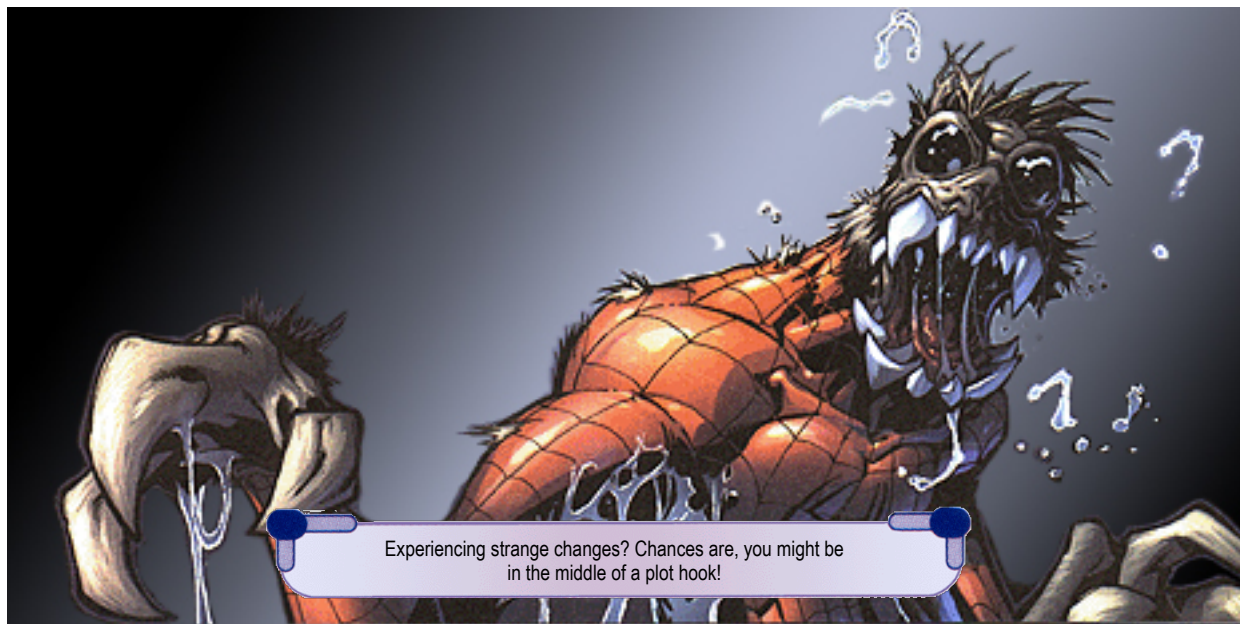
appearance of any kind of clue should be a tip that there is a mystery brewing, and the frustration is that the players can’t see the big picture or follow up on it right away. Let the players wonder what it all means and try to piece together the clues. Then, when you’re ready, allow the players to jump into the investigation as a plot hook to a brand-new adventure. Of course, you’ve designed it so that they’re guesses were right—sort of! There’s a twist to these appearances that springboards the adventure.

b) Fluctuating powers/health: Everything seemed to be going okay when the hero suddenly found his powers a bit . . . off. Or maybe the hero finds herself with a cough she can’t get rid of. Somehow, the hero has stumbled into a subplot featuring the state of his or her powers or general health. The hero might find himself with an added Challenge that he wasn’t expecting, and the ongoing mystery will reveal a little bit more on how it happened and (better yet) how it can be stopped/cured. Perhaps the weakness is a result of a previous adventure, or maybe a villain has targeted him for a nefarious plot. In any case, the added adversity makes the hero all that more heroic as he finally overcomes his subplot. (This is a tricky plot hook to spring on any player without his or her cooperation. Get your player’s permission before you try stepping out with this subplot or the player might think you’re “picking on him.”)

c) Increasing insanity: This one is like the “increasing weakness” except that it affects the character’s mind, as the hero descends into paranoia, madness, or deep

depression. The plot hook occurs as one-by-one the pillars of strength in the hero’s life are taken away. A loved one moves on or passes away, a friend is hurt, a hated foe gets away. The result of all of this is that the hero’s attitude becomes dangerous, even deadly. The other members of the group might be forced to confront him. Ultimately, the dangler is resolved when the hero is put in a final compromising position, a point of no return, and is forced to choose to give in or to begin a return to sanity. (As above, this is a tricky subplot and works best if you have the player’s permission and cooperation.)

d) Secret identity: There is more to a secret identity than a real name and occupation (and, in some cases, separate Attributes and Actions numbers). A lot of plot points that happen to a hero’s true identity happen in the way of a plot dangler. Trouble can start at work with the hero’s occasional absences due to adventuring. Loved ones can start to develop health issues or feel pressured to move away. Best friends can fall into trouble or start to run in the wrong crowd. A pesky reporter might start investigating some logical connections between the hero and his alter ego. All of these situations aren’t helped with the hero’s constant need to make excuses to disappear for long periods of time. The running subplot might force the hero to continue to create excuses and make hard decisions, but there will be a point when enough is enough. What are the implications of sharing his secret? The player might find himself out of job on one hand, but is it worth sharing a secret



Experiencing strange changes? Chances are, you might be in the middle of a plot hook!

if it risks the lives of others by drawing them into the hero's world?

e) Love interest: Like the secret identity, this subplot often forces the hero to keep making excuses for what a normal everyday citizen might consider bizarre behavior. In this case, each time the GM introduces the subplot, the hero risks losing what might be the love of his life. Alternatively, you can have the subplot be an important event in the life of the love interest, perhaps a traumatic turning point, a new career, or loss of something special. Because the hero can't be around all the time, the subplot only gives hints of what is really going on. The big reveal might change the course of the hero's relationship, or could even be the source of a new adventure, like a plot hook to search for an ingredient for a special cure, as an example.

f) Power fluctuations: Everything seems to be going fine when suddenly . . . something happens. Does your power short out, or did its power level suddenly spike to uncontrollable levels? Has your power developed a sudden allergy or aversion to a particular substance? The plot dangler may start with small, almost insignificant, instances. Over the course of your series, however, it becomes a nuisance, threatening the hero's personal life and maybe even shorting out during a critical time of battle. The mystery deepens as the hero investigates, and the subplot can wrap up in many different ways—a villain stands revealed, a new facet of the hero's power is discovered, or a Challenge is uncovered and resolved. This is a great subplot as you anticipate a player using Lines of Experience to create new Actions and Modifiers for his character.

g) Archenemy: The players may be going through the adventure unaware that their activities are being orchestrated as part of a larger scheme plotted by their greatest archenemy. Sprinkle little clues throughout the adventure that have the fingerprints of a recognizable archenemy. If it's the Green Goblin, maybe clones will be involved. If it's Doctor Doom, robots are bound to appear. For example, the heroes' big battle with a known supervillain takes a plot twist when it's suddenly revealed to be a robotic duplicate. Maybe all the major NPC's in the adventure are really robots! Combine this plot hook with the obstacles in menu 3, especially the red herring and blind

pathway ideas. Tease the players as they navigate one adventure with the hopes of reaching the ultimate archenemy. Alternatively, the players can be frustrated by having their archenemy taunting them every step of the way. It makes the enemy's final showdown (and his eventual defeat) so satisfying!

CREATING A QUICK 3-SCENE ADVENTURE

Sometimes all you need is a short adventure that your players can jump into right away. In the comic books, this might be the equivalent to a brief fill-in story between major story arcs or a small mini-series to spotlight some characters or situations outside your main campaign. Maybe you just want a premiere issue of your very own to see if your new star character has what it takes. Whatever the case, try this quick guide to create a short 3-scene adventure.

1) Choose three cool settings. Whether it's a dark alley, a fog-shrouded island, or an abandoned castle, choose whatever works for you and whatever will highlight or enhance the action that's taking place. Every memorable adventure has at least three places that make for good, dramatic scenery. They should be the backdrop for three scenes: a beginning, middle, and end. Arrange them in order of coolness, saving the best one for last.

2) Create an evil villain. Remember, if you're not using an existing villain and you don't have time to build a new one from scratch, just take an existing character from one of the Game Guides and change the name and description. Put the villain in the final setting, and give him an evil plot to pursue, such as experimenting on innocent people.

3) Write a story hook draw the heroes into the first scene. Mysteries always make good hooks: Where did this creature come from? Who is that shadowy figure? Why have all these people vanished? Then follow that up with a bang-- a dangerous rescue, a big fight, or a disaster of some kind. Before the heroes can leave the first scene, they need to find the clue, doorway, or path that leads to the second scene.

4) In the second scene, the heroes should have a chance to learn a little about the villain and his evil plans. But you can place a few obstacles between this and the final showdown. Obstacles

can be physical (locked doors, traps, crevices, molten lava, etc.), riddles or other characters (to fight or talk to, or both). If the heroes can overcome these obstacles, they should learn something that enables them to find the way to the last scene.

5) The last scene should be the hardest, but also the shortest. In this climactic scene, the villain's goal is to complete his or her evil plan, and the heroes' goal (obviously) is to foil the villain. The tougher the villain, the more dramatic, but this also makes it more possible for the heroes to fail. (If they do fail, of course, that gives you the perfect plot hook for the next adventure . . .)

TEAM DESCRIPTIONS

The NPC Team Generators in previous supplements (pages 55-70 of *The Guide to the X-Men* and 48-64 in *The Guide to the Hulk & the Avengers*) can help you to put together a strong team of super-powered opponents; however, all superheroes will eventually run into some form of "better-than-average" but still "normal" human trouble.

When working in teams, these highly-trained obstacles are not only nuisances, but they can also give your heroes quite the workout! All you have to do is pull together a number of these extras and you have an instant team.

In the comic books themselves, any individual member of these groups isn't necessarily fleshed out. We may know their statistics and behavior, but little else. In fact, each member plays the same role — that of a faceless agent of their collective organization. And really, how much do you need to know about them? What you need to know is what their parent organization requires of them, and how they'll react when the heroes stand in their way.

Even so, we did our best to catch the essences of these organizations in such a way that you can use these agents to flavor your world, either by using them as presented or modifying them to suit your needs (preferably both). And if you find yourself needing to flesh out an agent or group during play, just make it up yourself. Try exchanging or adding different equipment or beefing up/ changing Actions to reflect a more specialized team. After all, these are your organizations, now, in your world.

HYDRA Field Agent: HYDRA is a global, subversive organization dedicated to worldwide dominion. It's an espionage and terrorist organization as well as a cult, relying on fanaticism and worship of the Supreme Hydra to keep its members under control. Agents are loyalist Zealots that hold the HYDRA Ideals higher than their own lives. HYDRA also keeps 1 highly trained agents for every 10 field agents. To create these agents, increase abilities/actions and add leadership at 2 or 3. New actions can also be added to reflect more specialized training. **ABILITIES:** Int: 1, Str: 1 or 2, Agi: 1, Spd: 2, Dur: 2; **ACTIONS:** Close Combat: 2 (Strength Bonus), Ranged Combat: 3, Black Ops: 3, Vehicle Operation: 2; **EQUIPMENT:** Blaster Pistol (+3), Knives (+2), Watch-Radio; **BEHAVIOR:** Will follow orders. Does not question superiors or think beyond what he is told to think. Will tend to fight until at least half of their force has been decimated, or until a force that could kill them all presents itself. Will mobilize in large numbers and gang up on individual players in groups of 3-6. Will not willingly reveal information about the organization unless deprogrammed by someone with at least a 4 in any relevant social skill or other action. (Resistance: 5).

Hand Ninja: The Hand's ultimate goal is to spread its dark influence over the world, through threats and fear. More powerful warriors, like Elektra or Kirigi, can be created by increasing Abilities and Action numbers and adding Modifiers. **ABILITIES:** Int: 2, Str: 1, Agi: 2, Spd: 2, Dur: 2; **ACTIONS:** Ninja: 2 (Weapon and Agility Bonus or 2 weapons), Acrobatics: 2 (Agility Bonus), Black Ops: 2, Social Skills: 2 (Japanese Language/Culture, Ninja Culture); **EQUIPMENT:** Choose 1 of the following: Ninja Sword (+2), Quarterstaff (+3), Sai (+2), Shuriken (+1), Crossbow: (+2); **BEHAVIOR:** Will tend to be secretive, violent, and fiercely loyal to the Hand and supporting organizations. Will not willingly reveal information that would compromise the goals of the organization. Usually the Ninja's body dissolves immediately upon defeat.

A.I.M. Operative: Advanced Idea Mechanics is an organization of gifted scientists and hirelings dedicated to acquiring power and overthrowing all governments through advanced technology. Though well trained, personal safety comes second to the pursuit of its fields of study. A.I.M. will also equip its scientists with newly developed weapons, as opposed to

having, and funding, an army to protect itself. **ABILITIES:** Int: 3, Str: 1, Agi: 1, Spd: 2, Dur: 1; **ACTIONS:** Invention/Technology: 2 (Intelligence Bonus), Close Combat: 1 (Strength Bonus), Ranged Combat: 2, General Knowledge: 3 (Choose any 2 science-related specialties), Social Skills: 2 (Industry, Science Community); **EQUIPMENT:** Blaster (+3), Body Armor (+2 Defense), Air Filter (Protection vs. gasses); **BEHAVIOR:** Cunning and Resourceful. Will try to acquire advanced technology by any means possible. May attempt to kidnap heroes for study. Will design and develop hi-tech weaponry. May sell weapons and specialized equipment to supervillains and terrorists. Will not willingly reveal information about the organization unless he suffers at least 3 red stones of damage or if a player with at least 3 in any relevant Social Skill threatens him.

S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent: S.H.I.E.L.D. is a counter-terrorism and intelligence agency, often dealing with superhuman threats. S.H.I.E.L.D. is commanded by Nick Fury and is under the jurisdiction of the United Nations. It has vast technological resources at its command, and agents may have additional high-tech equipment according to their mission. **ABILITIES:** Int: 3, Str: 1, Agi: 1 or 2, Spd: 2, Dur: 2; **ACTIONS:** Close Combat: 3 (Agility Bonus), Ranged Combat: 3, Black Ops: 3, Computers: 2 (Intelligence Bonus), Vehicle Operation 1; **EQUIPMENT:** Plasma Beam Handgun (+3), Automatic Machine Pistol (+2), Armored Suit (+1 Defense), Secure Radio Link Pocket Computer, other equipment as needed; **BEHAVIOR:** Will be militant and follow protocol. May bail heroes out when they get in over their heads. May limit heroes by claiming jurisdiction and taking control. Usually loyal to the organization and will not reveal classified information. May possibly be corruptible or traitorous (at the GM discretion).

FBI Agent: The Federal Bureau of Investigation is a Federal police force, which is the principal investigative arm of the United States Department of Justice. The FBI has the broadest investigative authority of any federal law enforcement agency with an effective, but not always accurate, intelligence network. **ABILITIES:** Int: 2, Str: 1, Agi: 1 or 2, Spd: 2, Dur: 1; **ACTIONS:** Close Combat: 2 (Agility Bonus), Ranged Combat: 2, Criminology: 2 (Intelligence Bonus), Computers: 2 (Intelligence Bonus), Vehicle Operation: 1; **EQUIPMENT:** Hand Gun (+2), Cell

Phone, Palm Pilot; **BEHAVIOR:** Will often show up at the worst possible moment. Usually shoots first and asks questions later. May possibly be arrogant, believing that the end justifies the means.

SWAT Team Officer: The "Special Weapons And Tactics" officers are part of a high-risk police force. They don't ask questions, they just do what needs to be done to solve the problem at hand. **ABILITIES:** Int: 1, Str: 1, Agi: 2, Spd: 2, Dur: 1; **ACTIONS:** Close Combat: 2 (Agility Bonus), Ranged Combat: 2, BlackOps/Spying: 1, General Knowledge: 2 (Intelligence Bonus, Strategy and Tactics), Vehicle Operation: 1; **EQUIPMENT:** H&K USC45 (+3), Swat Vest (+1 Defense), Shortwave Radio, Handcuffs, Tear Gas Canisters (+2 area attack vs. Durability) or Concussion Grenades (+2 stun damage); **BEHAVIOR:** Will function as a well organized, coordinated team. Will mobilize against selected targets such as heavily armed criminals in secure locations. Will not mobilize in units less than 3.

Atlantean warrior: Atlantis remains a volatile nation, subject to violent political action according to its leader. Tremendously frustrated by the surface world's disregard of the environment, the people of Atlantis are willing to invade, if necessary, to be heard and to protect their world. Armies are led in units, and a squadron leader may have 1 or 2 added to his abilities and may command an Atlantean battle tank or a gigantic sea creature. **ABILITIES:** Int: 1 or 2, Str: 3, Agi: 2, Spd: 2, Dur: 2; **ACTIONS:** Close Combat: 3 (Strength Bonus), Ranged Combat: 2, Swimming: 4 (Strength Bonus), Vehicle Operation: 1; **MODIFIERS:** Susceptible to dehydration (requires water-breathing equipment); **EQUIPMENT:** Trident or spear (+2), Atlantean laser blaster (+3), Warrior armor (+1 Defense), Comm unit, Water-breathing helmet; **BEHAVIOR:** Attack the surface—invade and force them to concede to the army's demands. Lives by a code of honor even in the middle of battle, but violence may be dictated by current warlord.

In addition to the NPC's listed here, don't forget about the basic non-superpowered NPCs that can be found on pages 112 and 113 of the main Game Guide. While a small gang of street thugs probably won't present a serious threat to most heroes, they can certainly give any player a chance to be a hero!