

The Crusading Life

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In many super-powered hero campaigns, the action centers around individual adventures with world-endangering villains. Events between adventures are often of no importance and are sometimes non-existent. Players are faced with no continuity in the campaign, and characters become two-dimensional, coming to life only from crisis to crisis.

But what do heroes do when they aren't saving the world? What about the little people, petty criminals, normal world events, secret identities, and Life In General? A campaign without these factors becomes mechanical; players start the game *knowing* that some global plot is afoot. By throwing in some variety and surprises, the game master can return spontaneity to the campaign. Players will be more challenged and will get more out of the experience.

Day-to-day encounters

A variety of encounters and adventures gives the players the opportunity to flesh out their characters in day-to-day routines. This can help the players visualize better their characters, give the characters extra experience, give players more control over their characters' lives, and simply serve as a break from saving humanity day in and day out.

Heroes can be just as challenged by normal, non-powered criminals as they are by the big-name super-powered villains. What about hostage situations, attempts to capture a gunman at night, protecting a person from a hit man, or solving the mystery of a clever crime? Many of these situations are a hero's bread and butter, perhaps taking up a majority of his adventures and occasionally bringing in rewards which keep meat on the table. Played well, such adventures can be as fulfilling and exciting as world-saving — and perhaps more

so. Such situations are also useful for those sessions when only two or three gamers get together, since the average world-saving adventure is geared toward four or more characters.

Table A covers those crimes which average, nonpowered criminals are likely to commit (though super-powered ones can and do commit them, too). While most of these crimes may take place "in a vacuum" — having no bearing on the campaign as a whole — they may also be connected to major adventures by providing some clue or contact which will be needed later on. Minor crimes are easy to set up, particularly since the criminals can be generic (bad guys with guns), unless there is some particular reason for giving them more depth. We are all familiar enough with such crimes from watching the news to put together quite a variety of these encounters. Note that as the list of crimes on Table A progresses, the crimes become relatively more dangerous and are likely to involve gunplay or large criminal rackets.

Minor crimes give the heroes the chance to better their powers and test out new ones, experiment with equipment, do good deeds, and establish their personalities and methods of dealing with crime. Exposure to less momentous offenses can not only round out the characters, but can also lend an air of continuity, authenticity, and completeness to the hero campaign. They can boost the morale of the players by showing that the characters are satisfyingly effective against normal criminals; this can be particularly useful after an unsuccessful adventure against super-criminals.

Other events can also challenge the heroes. Helping the community raise funds or saving innocent lives in various accidents or disasters are good ways to put breathing space between major adventures (see Table B). Helping some-

one repair his house, business, or car can provide the group with useful contacts and public relations. Saving people from a burning plane, guiding a disabled ship to safety, or finding a missing bus can be challenging exploits, as is preventing or giving aid after major car collisions. Finding missing persons or retrieving stolen property can also provide a challenge to the heroes and are not particularly dangerous (most of the time). These actions will not only gain friends for the group, but can also bring in reward money, government (national or local) recognition and aid, or lead to contacts which are connected to an upcoming major adventure.

Nasty surprises

Being a superhero requires some exposure to danger, and any of the events discussed above can lead to lots of it. But, what about seemingly minor events which lead to particularly dangerous exploits and major adventures? These nasty surprises include traps, complex situations, misunderstandings, unexpected hazards, or events resulting from pure stupidity on the characters' parts.

Traps are usually set up by a villain in a major adventure who hopes to get a particular hero out of the way before the hero realizes that he's really in trouble. This seldom works in the comics, and it usually just angers the hero and makes him more determined to win, but the situation shows up with some frequency. Complex situations are those which can easily lead to further, originally unplanned adventures. Such events include things like getting the Mafia mad at you for saving someone from an assassination, trying to break up a mob situation and having the rioters turn on you, or discovering that a purse-snatching leads to a crime ring. These situations involve numerous ordinary criminals and may even be connected to the plots of super-powered villains.

Major misunderstandings often end up with the hero being thrown in jail or running for his life, as he is either purposefully framed or appears to commit a crime without actually doing it. Unexpected hazards include hidden terrorist bombs, driving into a high-speed chase situation, or following a criminal into an abandoned building that's about to be demolished. Pure stupidity covers all those simple situations in which the hero does something so absurd that it quickly devolves into a deadly event. Firing a weapon in the center of a gaso-

line storage building, jumping into the middle of a Mafia chieftains' meeting, or swooping in front of a jet are just a few examples.

Complications

If you want complications to appear in straightforward adventures, you might also consider the non-powered bystanders who frequent heroes' lives. Short adventures may center around the tribulations of various relatives and friends of the heroes. These people seem to get into more trouble than the heroes themselves.

The large number of nuts and kooks running around, particularly in major cities, should also be considered. These people are ordinary citizens who are a little crazy and are caught up in the mystique of super characters. Some hang around heroes and get into trouble, like those people who follow fire-trucks or police cars. Others come to feel that they, too, are great heroes; these are especially dangerous, as they may actually believe that they are helpful and even identify themselves as belonging to the heroes' group. These people can cause major embarrassments when they do something stupid, and they can be downright dangerous if they jump into the middle of a super-powered fight or pretend to have certain powers when they do not.

These same people can become violent enemies of any heroes who treat them badly or try to reason with them. Be forewarned: Disappointed hero-worshippers can make deadly foes if they happen to discover information about a hero and then communicate it to a villain. Role-playing these obnoxious personalities can be a real pleasure for the game master.

The government

Now we come to that fount of aid, the government. At its most agreeable, the local or national government can supply money, facilities, and other support to the heroes. At its worst, it can be intolerant, antagonistic, aggravating, and ignorant. In either case, the presence of the government adds to the game. A pleasant government may grease the tracks for a fledgling super-group, while the difficulties involved in dealing with the government can lead to more realism, interest, and variety in the campaign. The government is the one foe that the heroes cannot overcome — ever.

Government support can be invaluable. Money, in the form of rewards or

actual funding of the group, is always welcome. At least as useful is the research and development (R&D) end, which the government can perform for the heroes in areas such as new powers and equipment, enhancing existing powers, and counteracting villains' powers. The government can provide the best-equipped headquarters to its allied groups, and government aid in locating information, finding people, or defending the group in court can be incalculable.

There is a price for government aid. Never one to leave well enough alone, the bureaucracy in any superworld is going to try to get a popular hero group to do certain things — often things that the heroes would rather not do. From the government's standpoint, this is only fair, since it usually provides well for its favored groups. But, some of the activities which it demands from the group may be distasteful to the heroes. If the heroes complain often enough, the government may stop backing the group. If the group is particularly undiplomatic, the bureaucrats may try to teach the heroes a lesson by becoming extremely difficult and obnoxious.

Government regulations are cumbersome and confusing, but super-powered heroes circumvent them nearly every day. When the government backs the heroes, such indiscretions are usually overlooked (although not forgotten). If the government has it in for them, the heroes could be in serious trouble. Regulations appear as if by magic, bringing fines and legal problems. What happens when bystanders are hurt or property destroyed during the course of an adventure? What if the villain flees and leaves the heroes holding the bag? All is not sweetness and light when the government comes calling under these conditions.

Heroes are used to handling all sorts of problems, but the government is something else again. A government that turns hostile for a time can make a campaign extremely interesting. The time between adventures may be spent in evading federal agents or seeking to regain government favor. This "bad government" situation has to be used sparingly and logically, since overdoing it can kill the campaign quickly.

Even a completely hostile government knows that heroes have their uses. No one is going to treat the heroes and villains equally in any situation; if there is a chance, villains will be captured by government forces even if it means that the heroes escape. Secret admirers of

the pursued heroes may exist on many levels of the government, despite what official notices say. There should always be an out by which the heroes may regain their freedom and pursue their adventures.

Personalities

Characters in super-powered hero campaigns are often so powerful that it is hard to identify with them, and a player who cannot identify with his character will find it nearly impossible to enjoy role-playing in the campaign. Encourage the players to make their characters unique, giving them special personalities and foibles. Every hero is different, but characters are often not as unique as they could be.

Creating the super-persona begins when the character itself is created. Part of the creation process includes designing the hero's costume and noting why it looks the way it does. Does the hero have a secret identity? If so, a face mask is a must (very few can get away without it). Does putting on the costume prepare him mentally for "heroing," or does the character have multiple personalities, one or more of whom enjoy the heroic life? Is the character an egotist who wears his costume for effect (with neon, spangles, epaulettes, and all)? Is his costume intended as camouflage or to protect him from certain super-powers? Does the suit add to or magnify the hero's powers? All of these questions help to make the hero his own person.

When the hero is first created, the player should also note how the hero gained his powers and why he is acting as a hero. Perhaps he accidentally allowed a criminal to hurt his family, or he grew up in a slum and saw so much crime that he wants to do his part to stop it. Some superheroes are preachy, others cynical, some border on being as unscrupulous as the villains. All have their reasons for fighting crime.

Newly started heroes may have their share of mental problems, although these can also crop up later in their careers. Alcoholism is one possible problem; another is a habit of going berserk in combat and becoming not only dangerous to everyone around but also a potential killer. Events during the campaign may also lead to a character becoming so opposed to hurting people that he will use his combat abilities only as a last resort. Some heroes might be prejudiced against particular groups or have strange habits. All of these will help the players to visualize their char-

acters and role-play more effectively.

How the character gets along with other people is a critical aspect of his personality. Perhaps he constantly makes wisecracks even in the worst predicaments, or he never speaks unless the situation absolutely demands it. A character could be a playboy dating normal people or other supercharacters. The character could also be a loner, unwilling to follow some of the group leader's decisions. Another character might value the well-being of a loved one so much that he leaves the group to visit the character periodically. These characters might be difficult to deal with, but they would never be boring.

One thing to avoid in a hero campaign is the bloodthirsty hero. Most heroes do not take lives; to do otherwise would make them villains. Even when such an act is absolutely necessary, few heroes would be unmoved by such a decision. Virtually no hero would stand by and watch even the worst villain die without making some move to aid him. Yet, some players actually initiate super-combats on busy streets, jeopardizing innocent bystanders, or let a villain die of his wounds without lifting a finger. This should not be allowed to occur without a variety of consequences — such as court charges, arrest, hate mail, and attacks on the street by ordinary citizens.

Do super-powered heroes have fears? You wouldn't know it by watching most campaigns. Perhaps the most common hero's fear is having one's secret identity revealed. Another would be a fear of failure — that the hero could one day lose to a villain who causes widespread destruction or harm. A third is the fear of death, although this realization of one's own mortality may fade after many adventures. A hero who gains his powers sometime late in life may be afraid of losing them, and a hero relying on devices afraid of having to do without them. Phobias can also be found in heroes, usually related to their past histories or powers. A fire-oriented hero might be nervous near large amounts of water, or one with ice powers paranoid about high heat. Armored heroes could be afraid of drowning, or flying ones afraid of heights. Some childhood trauma could also lead to phobias which would be severely debilitating (fear of fire, large animals, open spaces, etc.).

As a hero progresses, he should learn the value of public relations. A happy public is a helpful one, and the information, rewards, and accolades make the job worthwhile. Helpful actions, such as

rescuing cats from trees and helping with mundane projects, should be viewed by the players as useful exercises in good business. A good image will help to prevent such things as trials and witch hunts when something untoward happens. A hero with good public relations is more likely to be given the benefit of the doubt in such situations, although the public is fickle and has a short collective memory.

One important decision which a new hero or group must make lies in locating and setting up a headquarters facility. Such a site is going to be both haven and target, and as such requires special treatment. The base must be accessible to people seeking help, yet protected against the enemies the hero or group creates through adventuring. A hidden headquarters is good for safety but bad for public accessibility, while a public office has the opposite problem. The group must decide for itself, balancing availability and security, and considering the group's resources, expectations, equipment, and powers.

If the game master enjoys lots of detail, he may invoke a need for single or group insurance and liability. In a world with super-powered people running around, insurance for heroes would be commonplace. Just what the world needs: an entirely new field of law! Nevertheless, a good lawsuit against a particularly negligent hero group can go a long way toward curbing its destructive tendencies. It is particularly galling if the successful suit is brought by a captured villain, who is not only freed as a result but ends up with the group's money! Insurance premiums would be extremely high for destructive groups, further penalizing players who think super-powers give them the right to do whatever they wish.

Hero organizations can be essential to a long-term campaign, and they may be of any size. Groups can serve many valuable functions. They provide cohesion and a cornerstone for many adventures. They fulfill the heroes' needs for money, since most supergroups have some financing or pooling of individual funds. They allow newer and weaker characters to have support and training, helping out when few other sources would. New players can learn the game while in the company of more experienced players, with everyone acting as a team.

Paying attention to details means a big payoff once play begins. Players with interesting characters and situations are more attentive and enthusiastic. Happy

players mean fewer hassles and more fun; bored players nitpick, argue with the game master and each other, and wander off. Good rules do not necessarily make a good adventure. Good characters can.

Table A: Everyday crimes

<i>d20 roll</i>	<i>crime</i>
1	Pickpocketing
2	Purse snatching
3	Animal cruelty
4	Destruction of property
5	Burglary
6	Theft
7	Auto theft
8	Truck highjacking
9	Blackmail
10	Extortion
11	Arson
12	Drug dealing
13	Kidnapping
14	Assault
15	Armed robbery
16	Murder
17	Espionage
18	Sabotage
19	Air or ship piracy
20	Mass murder

Table B: Special events

<i>d20 roll</i>	<i>event</i>
1	Find missing person
2	Prevent car or bus wreck
3	Save victims of car wreck
4	Prevent air disaster
5	Save victims of air disaster
6	Save people from storm, tornado, etc.
7	Help repair damaged building
8	Save person from vicious animal
9	Save suicidal person
10	Save people from building fire
11	Break up a mob or riot
12	Save people from gas leak
13	Save people from train wreck
14	Repair structure (bridge, subway, etc.)
15	Save community from gas or radiation leak
16	Save people from building collapse
17	Save people from flood (dam collapses, etc.)
18	Prevent ship from sinking
19	Save stranded people (island, arctic, etc.)
20	Save people from sinking ship or ditched plane