

# Above and Beyond

An M&M Superlink Supplement  
for High-Powered Superheroics

Requires the Mutants & Masterminds RPG by Green Ronin Publishing for use.

Sample file

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Created on a dual-processor Power Macintosh G4 running MacOS 10.2, using Adobe InDesign for layout and Adobe Photoshop for backgrounds and composition. This document uses the fonts Times Roman and Papyrus.

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# Introduction

Anyone with courage and initiative has it in themselves to save their hometown. Superheroes have the power to save a city, a state, and maybe even their country. Some few superheroes can even find it in themselves to save the whole world. It is rare indeed, however, to find someone who can save the entire universe.

Above and Beyond is role-playing game supplement dealing with high-powered, superheroic games. Epic, world-shaking powers, missions of cosmic importance, saving not just the world but the universe, and what it means to be more than human — all of these and more are inside.

## Using this Book

Players and GMs alike will find useful resources here, for creating cosmic heroes and nihilistic villains, or just for creating someone with unwanted and unbelievable power thrust on them.

Most of what you'll find in this book are essays and discussions about running high-powered games of epic scope. These can be used with any superhero role-playing game (and probably with some that aren't specifically meant for superheroes), though the systems and rules described in this book are designed specifically for use with M&M Superlink™. The authors of this book consider the rules found in M&M to be some of the best superhero RPG rules published to date. If you prefer a different system, you will have to do a little bit of work converting our character and power statistics to your favorite game.

If you're already familiar with the rules in M&M, you won't need anything extra to take advantage of the material in this book. A pencil, some paper, and a d20 are still all you need to play.

## What's in Here?

Chapter One is about the lives of exceptionally powerful supers. Who are they? What do they do? Perhaps more important, what *don't* they do? How do they react to ordinary people, and vice versa? Can they afford to wait for someone to make the first move, or do they have to start being more "proactive"? Can they retain their basic sense of humanity? Should they even try?

Chapter Two is about the same issues from a "metagame" point of view. Where could powers like this come from? How high a level is too high? How can the GM allow powers like Mind Control and Time Travel without their breaking the game? What kinds of hooks into characters this strong does the GM have?

Chapter Three describes the "control knobs" of the universe. How deadly will the game be? How realistic? Will it be centered near the Earth, or will it wander across galaxies and dimensions?

Chapter Four is the "crunchy bits" chapter, with a selection of powers that are appropriate to high-powered games, a few new feats, and some suggestions for making interesting custom powers.

Chapter Five has a roster of high-powered heroes, the Oversight Watch, and villains who could actually challenge them without destroying Earth along the way.

Chapter Six has interesting locations for a high-powered game, from an orbital headquarters to a dimension of dread.

### What Is Valent Games?

Valent Games is a small, independent game company run by Colin Fredericks. Our website is <http://www.valentgames.com>, and our other products include the science fiction RPG "Valence 592", and an RPG aptly named "Console," which parodies console games,

# References and Inspiration

Most superhero comics deal with more down-to-earth levels of power. Most heroes deal more with their own city or country than threats to the whole universe. However, there have been a few comics published in which the characters operated on a higher level. These comics served to inspire this book, and hopefully they can lend a bit of inspiration to your game as well.

Jack Kirby's *New Gods*, published by DC Comics, was probably the first of this genre of comics. The stories of New Genesis and Apokolips took place far from Earth, and the threats they faced were anything but trivial. Some of the New Gods stories can be found in collected form.

*Squadron Supreme*, a 12-issue series from Marvel Comics in 1985 and 86, is an interesting look at what people might do if they had, not only the ability to change the world, but the drive to do it. Worth reading because at least one of your players will think about playing a hyperintelligent biologist with the potential to cure cancer. It can be found in collected editions.

*Crisis on Infinite Earths* and the nine-years-later follow-up *Zero Hour*, both miniseries from DC Comics, exemplify the problems that ordinary superheroes have in dealing with the truly cosmic... and also show how very effective they can be when it comes to crunch time. Both can be found in collected form. They're also good examples of why you should keep your cosmology simple — both stories were told for the express purpose of cleaning up the DC universe.

*The Spectre*, from DC Comics, is the living embodiment of God's wrath, linked to a human soul. It doesn't get much bigger than that...

... unless you're one of the Endless, a character in *Sandman*. Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* was published by Vertigo Comics. Perhaps one of the most acclaimed storylines in all of comics, and winner of several Eisner Awards. It is currently out of print, but can be found in collected form in most bookstores. An excel-

lent example of how to deal with massively powerful, somewhat inhuman characters while still tying them to Earth and ordinary human beings.

*Infinity Watch*, from Marvel Comics, came out of the aftermath of a major Marvel crossover, the *Infinity Gauntlet* story. While *Infinity Watch* is no longer in print, *Infinity Gauntlet* can be found in collected form. Everyone who's anyone on the cosmic scale of the Marvel Universe can be found here.

*The First*, from Crossgen Comics, is part godly drama, part soap opera. It has little to lend to the "humans who become gods" standard view of things, but much to contribute to a game in which the characters are gods to begin with. It is still in print at the time of this writing.

JMS' *Rising Stars*, from Top Cow Comics, is another one that doesn't deal with massive power levels, but is very good if your characters want to change the world.

*The Authority*, from Wildstorm Comics, is the most visible of the recent über-powerful teams. Its short-lived spin-off, *The Monarchy*, was focused on even higher power levels. The first *Authority* series can be found in collected form, and the second one is still in print at the time of this writing.

Several more mainstream comics, such as DC's *Superman* and *Justice League*, Marvel's *Thor*, *Captain Marvel*, and *Silver Surfer*, and Crossgen's *Negation*, *Lawbringer*, and *Mark of Charon* have had to deal with threats beyond the average supervillain from time to time, and have had to wonder how far removed from humanity they really are. Most of them don't deal with such threats on a daily basis, though.

In more "respectable" literature, the works of Neil Gaiman (*Good Omens* and *American Gods*), Stephen R. Donaldson (the *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*), Roger Zelazny (his *Amber* series), Isaac Asimov (*The End of Eternity*) and Michael Moorcock (heck, pick any of his books), among others, all contain characters with power — and often angst — far beyond that of mortal men. Though most of these aren't very "comicy", they can be useful inspiration when creating a game that drifts a bit further from mainstream comics than most.

# Chapter One

This chapter deals with the in-character motivations, personalities, and reactions of cosmic PCs.

## The Legion of Power

Since role-playing is a group activity, characters will need to have some suitable friends to help them take over — uh, I mean save — the world.

All the players for a high-powered game should talk to each other while creating characters. Not only does this serve the usual purpose of preventing excessive power overlap (“Hey, I made a bruiser!” “Me too.” “Me three.” “Bummer.”), it provides the opportunity to decide where the campaign’s going. If one character wants to change the world and another only wants to preserve it, they’re inevitably going to come to blows at some point.

Like most super-teams, cosmic teams need a reason to be together. The standard justification is that each of them alone could save a world, but together they can save the universe. This works well for teams with interlocking powers and very little overlap (i.e. there’s only one dude with super-strength, only one with teleportation, etc.). Many comics super-teams were formed for this exact reason, “to defend the world from threats that no single hero could handle.”

Companionship is a good answer too. Not many people can really understand what it’s like to fight the Destiny Demon at the Nexus of Space and Time, while simultaneously protecting their girlfriend who doesn’t know the hero’s secret identity. Teams held together by companionship should have at least one scene in each gaming session when the characters just plain hang out somewhere. It could be at a bar or in the middle of the Dark Zone (or in the middle of a fight with totally inferior foes), but the characters are simply there to hang out, talk, and relax.

Some few super-groups are forced together by an outside entity, through mind control, threats, or blackmail. This is *very* rare for cosmic groups, as it would

take an entity of even *more* unimaginable power to bind them all together against their wills.

Some hero groups aren’t really well-organized. They just sort of fall together when things go bad. Mister Amazing notices a problem, calls Chaos Girl, who finds out that it’s even worse than M.A. thought, and suddenly the Universal Defenders are assembled once again.

Once the team’s all together and has a good idea of what they’re going to do (which is a whole separate discussion), they’ll need to find a suitable headquarters. Several suggestions can be found in Chapter Six.

## Membership Drives

If your character isn’t one of the founding members of a cosmic super-team, they could join in any number of ways:

Cosmic teams often have huge databases of information gathered on less powerful heroes, and pull recruits from those ranks when someone’s power level becomes sufficient. Who better to recruit than someone who’s been watched for years, especially if it’s someone with a good record?

Teams with a more competitive attitude might even hold tryouts, a sort of “Super Olympics”, with the winners being allowed to join the team. The problem with this method is that power doesn’t always equate to morality, and the team might end up with members who don’t get along. In an ordinary super-

### On A Higher Level

The characters in a game of this scope are assumed to be at least 20th level (by M&M standards), though a single team could easily range from 15th to 30th if everyone has their own little niche. Typically the combatants will be a bit higher-level, while the detective or scout types will be lower, simply because they don’t need the raw bludgeoning power.

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team this can spell the end of the team. On a cosmic team it can spell the end of the world, so a bit of caution is called for.

Covert teams might prefer to have less publicly visible members. They might recruit from those who work in the shadows, whose true power has only been hinted at before. Sometimes visibility and friendliness just aren't what 's needed.

Some people can't just sit around and wait to be recruited. They believe that their powers and outlook make them a necessary addition to a cosmic team. Such characters might do incredible deeds to try to convince the team. They might lurk in the background, following the cosmic team, waiting for their moment to jump in and save the heroes, thus proving their worth. They might even track the team to their headquarters and knock on the door... or break in and say, "Ha, I'm here, I'm so cool you *have* to hire me." Such methods work occasionally, but can also end catastrophically.

In the end, a cosmic super-group doesn't *have* to accept *anyone* new into their ranks, but it's a good policy for them to send people away happy one way or another. Anyone who was really powerful enough to join might be a dangerous foe if disgruntled and who knows when a current member might fall out, quit, or turn? Having a "reserve team" or at least a call list can be quite helpful in keeping the team up to full strength and in giving the permanent members much-needed vacations.

## "I'm Here to Help!"

The default assumption in a superhero game is that the characters, in addition to having their powers, have some driving need to help people. It might not be right on the surface, and it might not be obvious to the casual observer, but that drive is there.

There must be some reason why the characters haven't gone off and made a fortune with their abilities, right? Even if super-strength is their only power, they can probably get a job with a construction company as a human crane. Why risk their lives fighting crime — or in this case, the Dimension Devourer

Parasite from the Antimatter Universe — if they could just sit back and enjoy the good life?

When you create your characters, think about what they could be doing instead of risking their lives saving the universe. And come up with a good reason why they aren't out doing that right now. For some people the phrase "I'm the only one who can save us" is reason enough. For others, it's not. Some people take the job on sheer ego, believing that they're the only ones capable of doing the job (and loving that idea). Others are out for revenge against even higher powers, and are helping people almost as a side effect. Some are just so insecure that they can't decide what to do with their powers, so they pick the option that everyone's pushing them towards. Even cosmic heroes can cave in to peer pressure.

## A Day in the Life

What do people this powerful actually do every day?

My average day goes like this: get up, either go to either sit in a class or teach one. Have some lunch, do some homework, and play or write a game. If I'm lucky, my girlfriend isn't in another state, and we can hang out for a while; otherwise I'll be on the phone with her for a bit. Then it's set the alarm clock, brush my teeth, and go to bed so I can do it all again tomorrow. The best thing I hope for in my life is to get my PhD and go teach physics somewhere, and hopefully make my students' lives a little better.

When Infinite Man gets up in the morning, it's probably to some sort of alarm bell ringing. Before he even has breakfast he's off to settle a territorial dispute that was to be violently settled on Earth between alien empires. Then it's breakfast at *any restaurant he wants*. The morning finds him tracking down a bunch of unwilling time travelers, lunch happens with the delegation from the Blue Faction of Dimension Z, and in the afternoon he accidentally causes the event that sends 20 people spinning through the timestream against their will. His dinner in Tibet is delayed on account of a battle with the Clockmaster, who would much rather have those time travelers out there screwing things up. After three hours (subjective time, of

course) of grueling time travel, he finally returns to the transdimensional fortress he calls home and goes to bed. It's been a good day.

It's no wonder comic-book heroes are more dramatic and emotional than regular people. If your actions had that much impact on the world, you would be too.

## "Such things are forbidden, even to me."

What *don't* these characters do? With their own powers, and the powers of their friends, they could accomplish almost anything, given enough time. Some of them don't even need time; they can make their own! What kinds of things do they shy away from?

Traditionally, cosmic heroes don't try to mess around with world politics, regardless of how horrible a particular regime was or is. The only exception was during World War II, when US heroes routinely got involved in the war. Recently this has begun to change as well. Characters in many recent comics are, for example, not willing to catch muggers while letting human rights offenders go free. They're not willing to stop a shooting while allowing the execution of political prisoners. Which side of these political issues your character stands on will send a message to the whole planet, possibly even to the whole galaxy. There's another section devoted to this later on in this book.

Sometimes the man, woman, or slime monster you love can be a great inspiration for your heroes. Other times he/she/it is just a target for their foes. Therefore, some cosmic heroes try not to fall in love. They inevitably fail, but most at least give misanthropy a try for a few issues.

Cosmic heroes don't stop muggers, bank robbers, scam artists, or other common thieves. The exception is when it's just too easy; if they're flying from Alaska to Mexico City and you just happen to see a bank robber in mid-heist in Denver, of *course* they go stop the crime. However, most such cases get left

to the police and to less powerful heroes. When it's a choice between stopping a mugging and saving the universe, well... "Sorry Mister Fredericks, go call the police. We're off stopping the Masters of Doom from leveling your entire solar system." Many cosmic heroes feel guilty about making such choices, but they know the consequences if those choices aren't made.

Another aspect to consider is that many cosmic heroes believe that humanity should do things for themselves as much as possible, instead of relying on superhero protectors for every last thing. These heroes don't create cures for cancer or hyperfast computers, they don't interfere with what current governments, artists, and scientists are doing, and if they have the ability to do such things, well, they just don't make that common knowledge. The logic such heroes use is, "If I do these things, humanity will feel it's not in charge of its own destiny, and it's important to feel that you're in charge." There's an implied feeling in such statements that humanity doesn't really know what it wants or what's good for it, and unfortunately, that's probably a correct sentiment.

## "The Status Quo Can Kiss My..."

For those unfamiliar with the term, "status quo" means "the way things are now." Usually it refers to a social or political situation, but it can also refer to the current state of things like scientific knowledge, religious doctrine, or international trade.

Cosmic heroes who are still deeply interested in Earth will probably want to make a few changes to the status quo. They might not want to get involved in politics, or give the world "technology they're not ready for," but it couldn't hurt to dig the town a swimming pool or build a dam ahead of schedule, right?

Well, sometimes it can. Every construction job done at super-speed takes money away from construction workers. Every miracle cure created puts a pharmaceutical company out of business.

Does this mean that these things shouldn't be done? Of course not! By that logic, every time a life is