

**GOLDEN  
AGE  
GUARDIANS**

# NATIONAL CITY

*Setting information to go here, but in short, National City is the game's version of NYC. This is a Golden Age setting, though, where heroes and villains are easily distinguishable and morality is black and white.*

## National City Notes

*The National Anthem:*  
National City's leading newspaper.

*More setting notes here, as I think of it.*

# TERMINOLOGY

**Issue:** The current game session as it is being played.

**Cover Price:** The amount your comic would sell for. You must match this amount by coughing up earned Pocket Change before you are allowed to spend further Pocket Change to affect the game. Cover Price starts at 15¢, and then increases with each Milestone Issue.

**Collector's Value:** How much a given Issue is worth. This is the total amount of Pocket Change all players spend during an Issue, including the amount they put towards the Cover Price. If Collector's Value exceeds twice the Cover Price, the Issue is considered a Milestone Issue.

**Milestone Issue:** An Issue in which so much cool stuff happens it is considered a "must have" for collectors. At the conclusion of a Milestone Issue, each player gets to write a new Milestone or Subplot for their character, and the Cover Price of all future Issues goes up 5¢.

**Pocket Change:** Coins, in denominations of pennies, nickels, dimes, and sometimes quarters, which the GM awards to players when they do really cool stuff that makes the game better and more fun. The players can then spend the Pocket Change on Bennies, giving themselves an advantage, and driving the Collector's Price of the Issue at the same time.

**Bennies:** Special one-shot privileges a player can buy, allowing him to break the game's rules in very specific ways.

**Named Character:** Any character that a player or GM has prepared a character sheet for.

## What You Will Need

A handful of six-sided dice.

A couple dollars worth of loose change, in denominations of pennies, nickels, dimes, and a few quarters.

Some pencils and paper.

## Getting Started

Before you do anything else, you should do these things:

Come up with a setting for your comic. You may want to solicit your players for suggestions. National City is provided herein as an example.

Create a cool name for the comic book that you and your players will be a part of.

Decide upon its Cover Price (15¢ is the suggested starting point).

Have the players create characters. It's best to do this together, as a group. Do not try to play through an Issue the same night as you create characters.

Prepare the first Issue by creating some villains, figure out what those villains are up to, and hook their plots into the heroes' Motivations.

Get together and play the game!

**Unnamed Character:** Any character in the game not documented on a character sheet, even if they have been given a name and some background.

**Normal:** Any character in the game not possessed of super-powers or abilities.

**While You're Playing**

# CHARACTERS

There are four things a *GAG* character needs: a Portrait, an Origin, his Known Powers, and a Motivation.

## Portrait

A **Portrait** is simply a picture of your hero. If possible, you should draw it yourself. You can use existing artwork if you want, so long as you don't sell or publish it, but in doing so you are limiting your imagination a bit.

## Origin

An **Origin** story explains who the person behind the mask is, and how he came to be a superhero. It probably also delineates, in very broad terms, many of his powers and abilities, as well as some of his non-heroic talents. You get to write your hero's Origin story, but it must be fifty words or less, and you have to use (basically) grammatically correct sentences.

## Known Powers

Now, make a short list of your character's Known Powers, briefly explaining them if need be. Practice brevity; you don't need to compile an exhaustive list of everything you want your character to do...in **GAG**, inventing appropriate uses of power is no problem, so long as it makes sense for your character.

### Use Portrait and Origin Wisely!

At the start of a game, this is the only shared information about your character, and the only clue to the GM and other players as to what he can do. Think this stuff is useless? Think again! It's essential in determining how Conflicts will play out.

### No Numbers?

### Milestones and Subplots

On the character sheet there is room for two more things: Milestones and Subplots. Because this is the first Issue you've ever appeared in, you don't have to worry about these right now; you'll earn them by playing the game.

## Motivation

Your **Motivation** explains why you do what you do. It can be a single sentence, or a paragraph, so long as it gives the other players a sense of who your character is, and the GM a means to inspire you into action.

You can change your Motivation at any time.

### Milestones and Subplots

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### Naming Conventions Vulnerabilities

# SYSTEM

## Conflicts

**GAG** is all about **Conflicts**. A Conflict occurs whenever there is a disagreement about how something should happen in the game. The game mechanics provide a way to resolve that disagreement.

There are a number of ways a Conflict can reveal itself, but it almost always boils down to a difference of opinion between a player and the *GM*, or between two players. If there is no dispute, there is no reason to roll the dice. In general, players can only dispute things that pertain to their characters, and the *GM* will only ever dispute things that the player characters themselves are attempting.

## Resolving Conflicts

As soon as you realize there's a Conflict, you and the *GM* (or another player, if the Conflict is *PC vs. PC*) can begin resolving it.

The first thing you have to do is describe how your character intends to win the Conflict. This is known as the **Declaration**. You can not, as part of your Declaration, call upon powers or abilities it would be impossible for your character to possess (if it's not hinted at in your Portrait or Origin, the *GM* can veto it). Also, if you or the *GM* want to reference any Milestones to help win the Conflict, it must be done at this point.

Next, you and the *GM* must secretly answer the Big Question: "Do you think the character can win this

### Who Gets To Say What Happens, And When?

Every rpg, to one extent or another, has to answer the above question. It all boils down to one thing: When someone says something, when does it become truth in the game world, and when is it just a suggestion?

In **GAG**, as in most rpgs, the buck stops with the *GM*. If you say "My hero leaps from this rooftop to the next", it does not actually happen and become in-game fact until the *GM* says it does. And if he says it doesn't, it doesn't.

The one exception to this rule is when you win a Conflict resolution. When that happens, you get to narrate the outcome of the Conflict, saying "this happens, and it's a fact!" No one can refute the outcome of Conflict.

### Outcomes and Consequences

When you roll the dice to resolve a Conflict, nothing can ever not happen. This is important. In in-game terms, it means something was attempted, and something must happen. Successful rolls always get something done for you, which you get to narrate, and failed rolls always lead to greater complication and conflict, which the *GM* gets to make up. Remember this when you engage in a Conflict.

Conflict?" Choose one of the following four responses as your answer: *Definitely, Probably, Possibly, or Never*. Your answer should be based upon whether you actually think the character can succeed, what you want to see happen, and how you think the GM might answer. Now, you and the GM reveal your answers to one another. How you answered, and how your answers match up with the GM's, will determine your **Die Pool**, the **Difficulty**, and the **Victory Condition**.

The Die Pool is how many dice you get to roll when resolving the Conflict. It's determined by how you answered the Big Question. If you answered:

- Definitely, then your Die Pool is five dice.
- Probably, then your Die Pool is four dice.
- Possibly, then your Die Pool is three dice.
- Never, then your Die Pool is two dice.

The Difficulty is the number you need to exceed on any rolled die for that die to be considered a "success". It's determined by how the GM answered the Big Question. If the GM answered:

- Definitely, then the Difficulty is 2.
- Probably, then the Difficulty is 3.
- Possibly, then the Difficulty is 4.
- Never, then the Difficulty is 5.

The Victory Condition tells you how many successes you need to roll to win the Conflict. If you and the GM matched answers to the big Question, the Victory Condition is one success. Otherwise, you need two successes.

Now, roll the dice in your Die Pool. Keep each die that *exceeds* the Difficulty. If you keep at least as many dice as the Victory Condition, you win the Conflict and get to describe the outcome! Otherwise, the GM wins and gets to describe the aftermath.

**When Player  
Characters Collide!**



# Combat

Superhero games tend to focus on combat. In all likelihood, so will this one. Even so, **GAG** deliberately keeps the process simple and to the point.

*GAG* combat is a Conflict, just like any other. The *GM* describes what the NPCs are doing, the player involved gives a Declaration, and the Conflict resolves as normal. Whoever wins the Conflict roll gets to describe what the combat looks like, narrating it to its conclusion.

The default combat always concludes the same: The loser takes his licks, but ends up escaping capture somehow. If you want a different end to the combat, you'll have to buy it as a Bennie with Pocket Change (and if the *GM* wants a different ending, he'll have to give you some Pocket Change). Some optional combat Bennies are listed here:

## Player or *GM* wants...

- ...to stun his opponent: 1¢
- ...to daze his opponent: 5¢
- ...to knock-out his opponent: 10¢
- ...to capture his opponent: 25¢
- ...to kill his opponent: 50¢

## Combat Bennies Defined

**Stunned:** The next Conflict in this scene involving the Stunned character is automatically considered a match (if the stunned character is an NPC) or a non-match (if the stunned character is a PC) when figuring Victory Conditions.

**Dazed:** If your opponent is dazed, you may immediately make one non-combat Declaration, an action that would normally be considered a Conflict, and have it automatically succeed. This includes rescuing or reviving other characters!

**KO'd:** The character is removed from the combat, and can take no actions for the remainder of the scene, unless revived.

**Captured:** The character is removed from the combat, and from all further scenes, until rescued.

**Killed:** The character is removed from the game permanently.

*More combat stuff to go here, when I think of it.*

### **Initiative**

Many games implement an Initiative system for combat, so as to know who does what and when. **GAG** has no such mechanics. Instead, what happens is that the *GM* describes what is going on in a scene, what the villains are trying to do, and you describe how you want to act or react.

The key to making this work is remembering that you can disagree with the *GM* about anything, resorting to the dice for clarification. If you're playing a Speedster and think you should go before someone else can act, call for that Conflict!

### **Killing Normals**

Normals seldom die in comics, particularly Golden Age era comics. The same is true in this game. If you want to describe the death of a minor Normal, it costs you a nickel. If it's a named Normal, or a group of unnamed Normals, it costs a dime.

The *GM* must pay you for the right to kill the same Normals, but he does so at one denomination less.

Even when characters do die, it's seldom gory or messy. Keep that in mind.

Other combat Bennies - Stunning, Dazing, Capturing, or KOing - are free when applied to Normals.

## Milestones

A Milestone is a seminal event in your character's past, so important that you have chosen to list it on your character sheet. You can then reference that event during a Declaration if it seems to have some bearing on the Conflict at hand.

When referenced during a Conflict, a Milestone eliminates the worst possible response the GM could choose when answering the Big Question.

A Milestone can only be referenced once during an Issue, unless that Milestone came from the Issue that immediately preceded the current one.

During any Conflict, you can reference one, and only one, Milestone.

## Pocket Change

Throughout a game session, players collect **Pocket Change**. Pocket Change - in 1¢, 5¢, 10¢, and occasionally 25¢ denominations - is awarded by the GM to the players when they do something cool and/or dramatic (or when the GM wants to do something especially nasty to them that's outside the normal scope of the rules). It can then be spent by the players to purchase Bennies - special privileges that allow them to override the rules in specific ways - but only after they've earned (and coughed back up to the GM) enough Change to cover the Cover Price of the Issue.

Pocket Change spent by the players is collected by one player, and represents the **Collector's Value** of the comic. The Collector's Value is important, in that when it reaches a certain value, the current Issue is deemed a Milestone Issue, allowing the players to add a new

### Covering the Cover Price

In case it's not stated clearly enough, before anyone can purchase Bennies, the group as a whole must earn and give back enough Pocket Change to equal the Cover Price of the Comic. This Change is considered spent, but does not bestow any benefit.

Milestone or Subplot to their character sheet (more on all this later).

Players can choose not to spend their Pocket Change, hoarding it for a future Issue. However, they only get to keep half of what they earned. Hey, it's a whole month between comics, and other expenses come up!

Players may freely exchange Pocket Change among themselves.

Players may spend Pocket Change to affect Conflicts their characters are not involved in.

Players may continue to spend Pocket Change to affect the game, even if their hero has been killed, knocked-out, captured, or otherwise removed from play.

What follows are two lists: One that gives the GM some guidelines on when to award Pocket Change (and about how much), and another showing the players some of the Bennies they can spend it on.

### **Back Issues**

Lots of things have happened in comic books - more than you could remember. Villains and heroes have appeared and fought and then been relegated to obscurity. But those comics are out there somewhere, and all you would have to do is find them - at garage sales, in the backrooms of stores, in your grandpa's musty attic, etc. -to be able to put them to use.

You can buy a Back Issue of a comic for 1d6¢, and immediately reference the events in that comic, treating it as a Milestone for whatever Conflict you are involved in. Pay the price, describe the events the Milestone refers to, and then finish resolving the Conflict, using the normal Milestones. Remember, this is a one time use; it provides no benefit beyond the current Conflict.

Back Issues are special in that money spent on them does not go towards the Collector's Value of your comic; it's lost money. However, they do have an advantage, in that you can buy a Back Issue even if you haven't met the Cover Price of your current Issue yet.

## Pocket Change Awards

### Player...

- ...engages in witty banter: 1¢
- ...addresses a subplot in a meaningful way: 5¢
- ...resolves a subplot: 10-20¢
- ...does something that makes the GM laugh: 1¢
- ...does something that makes the GM go "cool!": 5¢

### GM...

- ...introduces a major new Villain: 10¢
- ...increases a Conflict Difficulty by one (no higher than 5 though): 5¢
- ...forces the player to re-roll during a Conflict: 10¢

### Bennies

- ...Add an extra dice to your Die Pool: 1¢ for one, 5¢ for two, and 10¢ for three
- ...Re-roll your die pool during a Conflict: 10¢
- ..."Meanwhile...": 5¢
- ...introduce a minor NPC of your own invention: 1¢
- ...Buy a Back Issue (see sidebar, previous page): 1d6¢

### "Meanwhile..."

For a nickel, you can take command of any unnamed NPC and play through a scene with him or her. This NPC can not have any contact with your hero during the scene. This does not count as addressing a subplot for you, although it might for another hero.

### "Naming" NPCs

#### Creating Your Own Bennies

The list of Bennies to the left provides just a few examples. In theory, a player could buy nearly anything, with an appropriate amount of Pocket Change. If a player wants something bad enough, and it seems reasonable, the GM should give it a cost and let them buy it.

However, there are a few things a player **can never** buy, no matter what. They are...

...a change to the Difficulty of a Conflict

...a change to the Victory Condition of a Conflict

# COLLECTABLES

## Cover Price, Collector's Value, and Milestone Issues

Every Issue has a **Cover Price**. This is the amount someone would pay to buy the Issue right off the newsstand. Most **GAG** comics start with a Cover Price of 15¢.

As game play progresses, the Issue earns a **Collector's Value**. This is what a collector would pay to buy that Issue years down the road, once it becomes a collector's item. As a player of **GAG**, you want every Issue to exceed its Cover Price if possible, making your comic as collectible as possible.

The Collector's Value of an Issue increases when you spend Pocket Change. The Collector's Value of the Issue is the total amount of Pocket Change all players spend during an Issue. If that amount exceeds twice the Cover Price, the Issue is considered a **Milestone Issue**.

### What's So Great About Milestone Issues?

Two things.

The first is that someone gets to write a new Milestone for their character. Only one player gets this opportunity - the person who spent the most Pocket Change on the Issue. If he declines, it goes to the next highest spender, and so on. Everyone else gets to write a new Subplot (which is still really cool).

The, the Cover Price of all future Issues goes up 5¢.

#### Writing Milestones

A Milestone is essentially a precedent - it's proof that you're character is capable of doing something. When writing a Milestone, it has to be a specific account of something your character actually did. And it has to be exactly one sentence.

#### Writing Subplots

Subplots are things the hero has to deal with on the side of his crime-fighting career. They usually involve things going on his normal life - work, family, etc. - but are not expressly limited to such things.

You want your subplots to be interesting and easy for the GM to work into an Issue. Addressing a subplot during play is an easy way to earn Pocket Change, so you will want them to come into play.

As a secondary benefit, writing a Subplot allows you to create NPCs all of your own, which the GM must then work into the game. This is a subtle, but powerful, way to influence the game's direction, especially when you use the "Meanwhile..." rule to lay and position those NPCs in the story.

# PLOTTING SCENARIOS

Writing adventures for **GAG** is easy. Design a villain, or maybe a group of villains, give them an evil plot, and go! In fact, **GAG** demands that and just that.

The following section is written with the *GM* in mind, so "you" always refers to the *GM*.

## Villains

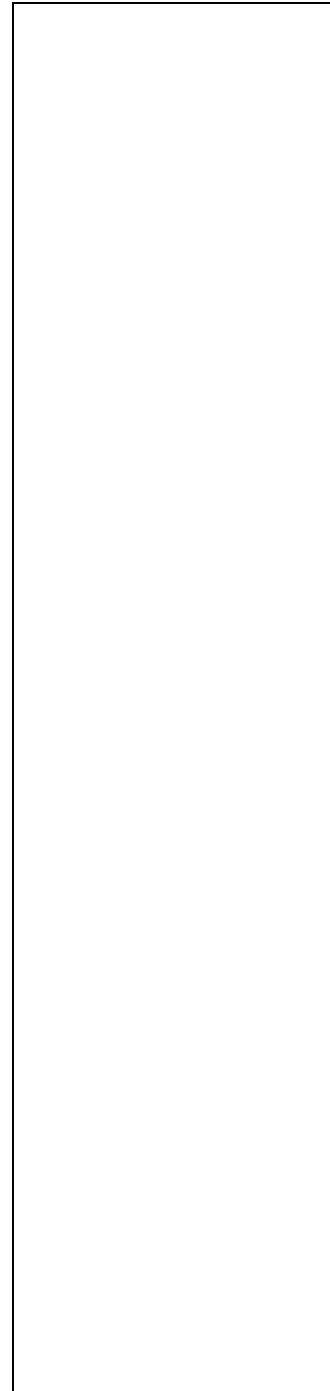
Villains are designed much like heroes. Write up their Origin and Known Powers. Give them a Motivation. Create a Portrait for them.

Make sure your villains have big goals. They want something, and they're willing to go to great lengths to achieve it. Furthermore, they should have to go to great lengths; simple, easily achieved goals are boring, and will provide for really short, dull games.

Do not give your Villains pre-existing connections to the player characters. If the players want these connections to exist, they will have to create them with Subplots.

## Evil Plots

Having created the villain, including his goals and Motivation, you probably have a pretty good idea of what he wants. Now you need to figure out how he's going about getting it. The Evil Plot should be dramatic and convoluted, with lots of opportunity for big scenes



and set pieces. Massive destruction is always good.

Evil Plots should be made up of multiple objectives which, when strung together, lead the villain to his objective. Of course, the heroes will try to foil the villain's plots, so you may also want to think of some contingency plans.

## **Making It Go!**

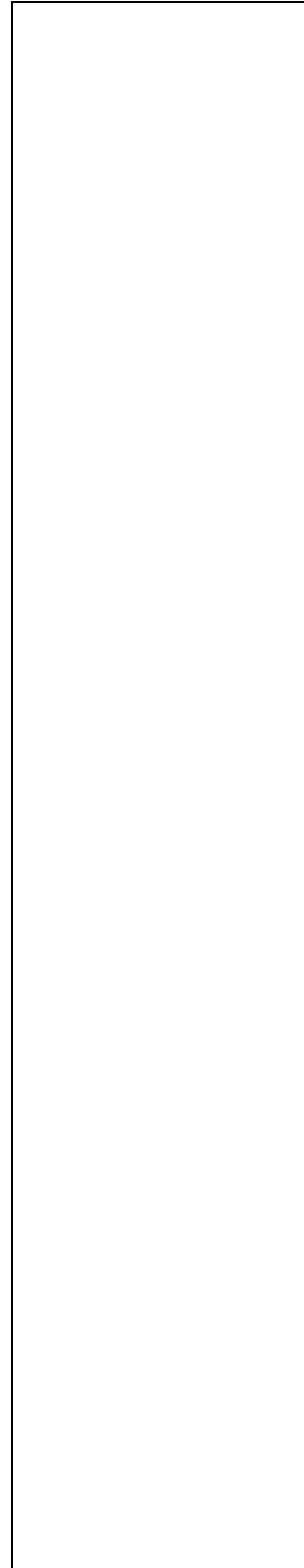
Game play takes place in scenes. You decide where the scenes take place and what's going on at the start of them. At least one player character must be present in any scene; you decide who's present and when they show up, and as soon as they're introduced into the action, they can start doing stuff.

There are three types of scenes you can frame: Advance the Evil Plot, Understand the Evil Plot, or a Subplot. Furthermore, you can mix and match, combining elements of all three.

A scene to **Advance the Evil Plot** features the villain, his lackeys, or some threat he has created that in some way furthers his agenda. The heroes must have some opportunity to discern the villain's objectives and potentially foil them. You are free to frame this kind of scene whenever you want.

A scene to **Understand the Evil Plot** involves the heroes analyzing evidence, interrogating prisoners, seeking information from someone in the know, etc. It should potentially reveal some clue about the villain's Evil Plot as a whole. You can not frame this kind of scene unless a player asks you to do so.

A **Subplot** scene involves characters and situations described in one of the character's Subplots. These





types of scenes can be totally unrelated to the villain's Evil Plot, but they are not required to be so. You can not frame a Subplot scene until a player asks you to. A player can only request one Subplot scene per Issue, although, if their hero has multiple Subplots, you get to decide which one to spotlight.

Because of the way scenes work, the only scenes you can count on happening are scenes to Advance the Evil Plot. Thus, prepping any given Issue is easy: Come up with the villain and his Evil Plot and figure out a number of scenes you could have that would advance that Evil Plot. Be prepared for the heroes to ask for scenes to Understand the Evil Plot, and know their Subplots so you can be ready when they ask for one.

