

Mutatis Mutandis

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Introduction

The question we should ask isn't "what would I do if I had superpowers?" It's "what would I do if *everyone* had superpowers?" We all know that it doesn't take powers to make a hero, that there are everyday heroes around us in real life: firemen, paramedics, and others who have dedicated their lives to helping their fellow man and woman. If you had superpowers maybe you'd go out and help people too — but what if everyone else had powers, too? Wouldn't it still be worth it?

Mutatis Mutandis describes an alternate present for our own world: a world where superpowers appeared much earlier and in a much more prolific manner than they did in most comic books. Rather than a single cataclysmic event granting a few people powers, everyone on Earth has gradually developed powers over the course of the last century and a half. Needless to say, the world is a little different from what we're used to seeing. The world has had more time to adapt to them, and to the idea of everyone having powers.

The first 30 pages of Mutatis Mutandis are oriented towards players, giving new feats and powers, advice on picking powers, background for this very changed world, and a brief timeline of the last century or so. The last 14 pages are oriented more towards the GM, describing some plot seeds and NPCs to use with them.

There was a lot more that we could have done here — descriptions of the high-tech gadgets that superintelligent scientists invented, a more detailed timeline, a billion more plot hooks — but space and time restrictions prevented us. Instead, we've left you with a wide open setting that could take you any of a dozen ways, which can sometimes be better than getting straightjacketed into a single overwhelming plotline.

We'll be back in August with our first complete game: the Undying Lands. A short but powerful rule-set will be coupled to a compelling faerie-land setting that draws more on Neil Gaiman than Mother Goose. We hope you enjoy it as well as you do this issue.

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Inspiration

The **Earth X**, **Universe X**, and **Paradise X** series from Marvel Comics are what got the ball rolling for us. They describe a future where everyone got superpowers in a much more sudden and insidious manner, one that gave people no time to prepare and had some nasty side effects. Despite the differences in the feel of the world and the focus of the comic on superheroes, it's still a great reference.

Alan Moore's **Top Ten** and was quite useful in describing a world full of powers, though they tend more towards a world full of superheroes than normal people with powers. It's worth reading just to spot the cameo appearances in Neopolis' skyline. It's also a great example of how you don't need the strongest powers in the world to be an effective cop — training is still just as important as it is in the real world. A tip for powered people of loose morals: beware S.T.O.R.M.S..

Issues of Kurt Busiek's **Astro City** have also been instructive as to how the courts would handle issues of mind control, possession, doppelgangers, and other identity problems.

Television about with cop dramas, which have become significantly more realistic in recent years. Such shows as ABC's **NYPD Blue**, NBC's **Homicide: Life on the Street** and **Law and Order** (not to mention its many spin-offs), CBS's **CSI**, **Without a Trace**, and **The District**, even Fox's **Cops**, and probably dozens of others, can give good plotlines for police-based campaigns. You just have to alter things a little to take into account detectives with postcognition or enhanced senses. Fire department and hospital dramas (such as **ER**), while not quite as prolific, are also relatively easy to find.

For slightly higher-level games, Jeffrey T. Richelson's book **A Century of Spies**, along with a few other books on the topic, give us a picture of exactly what's going on around us in the espionage and intelligence agencies. A little dry, but a great reference for spy games that don't want to be **James Bond**. Of course, if you prefer to be Bond, there are only 20+ movies to watch, not to mention books and variations on the theme by other movie studios. The

Gadget power makes all those gizmos look downright believable. For people who want basically the same thing with female protagonists, Wildstorm's **Danger Girl** comic fits the bill exactly.

Thanks to Marvel's **The Ultimates**, just for giving us the phrase "Persons of Mass Destruction," and to the movie **Office Space** for giving us the title for one of our plot seeds.

JMS's **Rising Stars** has some great examples of government and corporate superheroes, suitable for the higher-powered end of this book. Note that the guy who dresses up in a costume to fight crime is considered a freak and a menace by many — the same holds true for this world.

The **Wild Cards** series, contributed to by various different authors, gives a view of a world where powers are just as often a curse as a blessing (and not just in the "oh, I've got unwanted attention, oh no" way that they're a curse in the comics). The quality of the stories can be somewhat mixed, but several of them are worth a read. Also a good example of powers as an extraterrestrial disease.

The works of scientist **Nikolai Tesla** were an inspiration for this book, though those reading through them for plot ideas should take care — Tesla was a certified genius, but also a certified nutcase. Anyone who actually tried to build a death ray must have had a few screws loose.

Lastly, L. Frank Baum's little-known book **The Master Key: An Electrical Fairy Tale Founded Upon the Mysteries of Electricity** gave us the idea for electricity-induced superpowers.

How the World Changed

History

The following section is taken from a lecture given by Prof. H. Zweibel, Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute, 2004, in his course, "The Social Ramifications of Parahuman Abilities."

The history of parahuman abilities, often known in the vernacular as "super-powers" or simply "powers," is inexorably entwined with that of the history of the electric industry. We know now what our predecessors could not in their time understand: that the presence of massive amounts of controlled electric current unlocks the dormant capability to perform feats above and beyond "normal" mortal ability. We also know that this is not a freak occurrence, but rather a potential latent in each and every human being.

The first publicly documented cases of parahuman ability occurred in 1882, shortly after the installation of Edison's first electric power station in New York City. The individual involved, a policeman named Michael Mathews, demonstrated invulnerability to harm from knives, bullets, acids, fire, and other hazards. Of course, this is only the first public

case of powers; likely the first actual person to use powers was a researcher in Edison's laboratories, which may explain the rapid successions of inventions produced there. Shortly thereafter, with Tesla's development of viable alternating current generators and Westinghouse's construction of the Niagara power station, along with the spread of power lines to households in both urban and rural areas, more and more people began to develop parahuman abilities, both in America and in those countries where widespread electric power was popular.

A side note must be made while on the subject of Tesla. Nikolai Tesla, the inventor of the polyphase alternating current method of electric distribution used today, was an amazing pioneer in a field riddled with theories little better than educated guesses. It's entirely possible that he understood more about electricity and electromagnetism than any of our current researchers. This makes his disappearance in 1943 all the more distressing, as not even Randall Masters, widely acclaimed as the smartest man on the planet, can understand some of Tesla's more advanced theories and designs.

The changes to the standards of life were swift in those days, as slowly but surely countries adapted to labor pools where one man could do the work of ten. Mass production, processing, and distribution of goods and groceries became possible, as did the first developments of mass transit. More and more people of every walk of life developed powers, and even President Taft once displayed his powers of elemental conversion, marking him as the first President, and first world leader, to publicly admit to parahuman abilities.

After the assassination of Austria's Archduke Franz Ferdinand, war was of course imminent. World War One saw the use of experimental "special" divisions, such as the British Steel Legion (comprised primarily of invulnerable infantry). While such divisions were highly effective where they were deployed, they were not widespread, and many massive losses resulted from the redirection of troops around these special divisions. In the end, Germany and her allies tasted defeat, and paid their penalties dearly, despite the Russian front pulling out early to deal with the Bolshevik Revolution.

The First of Many

Officer Mathews was not in fact the first person to manifest parahuman abilities. Rather, he was the first to publicly display his powers (albeit unwillingly and unknowingly), and as such assumed a place in history not rightfully his. Nor were any researchers of Edison's the first, nor (as some may assume) Benjamin Franklin either.

The first actual, though undocumented, occurrence of parahuman abilities was Alessandra Cont di Volta, creator of the first chemical battery. No one noticed Volta's sudden development of multiple ranks of Protection, as it simply never became important or relevant.

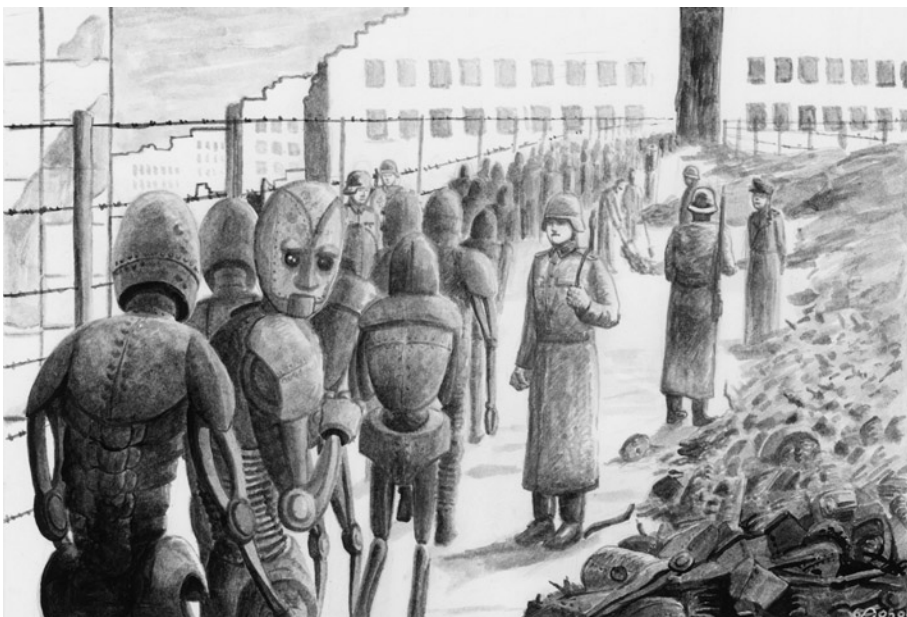
After the Great War, parahuman abilities were put to great use in the restructuring of America. New highway systems, such as those developed specially for the day-to-day use of super-speed, finished construction in record time. Scientists and researchers with quadruple-digit IQs produced breakthrough after breakthrough, stunning the world with everything from nutritious preservatives to mechanical computers to nuclear fission. Most importantly, rural electrification programs brought the United States closer to total electrification, an area in which other nations, such as Japan, Germany, and Britain, were already ahead.

Any history textbook can tell you of the developments leading to the Second World War: the economic and military depression, the rising power of National Socialism, and the developing alienation all coming to a head in Germany. Adolf Hitler rose through the political ranks until he eventually declared himself Fuhrer of the Third Reich, absolute leader of a regime of hate and tyranny. Under his rule, the Nazis waged war on the rest of the world while embarking on the annihilation of non-Aryans in the lands they already held. Millions upon millions of Jews, homosexuals, blacks, Rom, Catholics, shape-shifters, robots, and anyone else deemed inferior by the Nazis suffered and died at the hands of the Third Reich. To America's shame, we involved ourselves in the war only after Japan sent a kamikaze squad of living soldiers to attack Pearl Harbor at supersonic speed.

The Second World War was quite possibly the most devastating to ever occur on the face of the Earth. It marked the true beginning of super-powered warfare, as entire battalions of soldiers organized according to parahuman capabilities faced each other on the ground, while legions upon legions of flyers clashed in the skies above. The property damage alone was tremendous. Only the threat of mutually assured destruction kept nuclear warfare from crossing the line from theory to actuality. President Truman's memoirs indicate that he strongly considered ordering hydrogen bombs to be dropped on Japan. In the end, however, the Allied powers won out, preventing what could only be thought of as worldwide disaster.

By 1956, governmental regulations regarding powers finally stabilized, and in 1959 the Parahuman Activities Regulatory Force (also known as Paraforce) began the enforcement of these laws. Given jurisdiction solely over the misuse or abuse of powers, the federal organization soon became one of the busiest law enforcement agencies in the nation. In its early days, it clashed somewhat with the Federal Bureau of Investigation over matters of policy and jurisdiction, but in the 1970s this cleared up with the introduction of newer, more specific regulations for each agency.

Life was fairly good in those times, despite the constant threat of the Cold War. Perhaps in a world without powers, the Soviet Union would not have been quite as stable as it was, although the same may be said of the United States. French researchers developed nuclear fusion in the late Fifties as an alternative energy source to fission, and the Department of Agriculture instituted several programs, such as expanded harvesting and livestock cloning. During his campaign, John Kennedy promised that we'd see a man on the moon within ten years, but before he was assassinated in 1963 we not only had a man on the moon, we had satellites orbit-



ing Mars and the foundation of a lunar colony program..

Vietnam was a glaring exception to the good life. In short, it was a war in which the United States simply did not belong. It was also a war we chose to fight poorly. When we began the war, we still maintained the same troop organization we held in World War Two, with units arranged according to power type. This, of course, resulted in the specific targeting of units by enemy troops optimized to attack our soldiers' weak points, or simply to nullify their powers with Soviet-provided power negators. We lost a lot of good men in that war before we smartened up, and by then it was too late. Eventually we pulled out, but not before learning a terrible lesson.

With each passing year the number of people we once called parahumans grew to the point that by the Seventies it was extremely difficult to find anyone without powers. In order to find a "normal" human, one had to travel to Tibet, aboriginal Australia, or some other similarly isolated area. Before the end of the Eighties the word "parahuman" had dropped out of common usage, as nearly every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth qualified as parahuman.

The Nineties saw the end of an era which people fifty years ago would never even have dreamed of ending. On November 5, 1997, the Soviet Union dissolved after internal conflict, hidden from the rest of the world by the USSR's near-complete control of its media and psychics. Many of the territories once held by the Union splintered off into their own independent republics, and several fast and dirty conflicts blitzed by in rapid succession as the various powers that be bid for control of the new republics. By the end of these brush wars, the lines of the map were clearly defined, and all nations involved remained strong thanks to the remnants of a production and distribution

Perhaps the most recent and sweeping change to our world came in 2001. On September 11, a day which none now alive will soon forget, fundamentalist terrorists crashed a pair of passenger hyperjet planes into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. Emergency teams were mobilized, but not quickly enough, and the towers fell. Enough has been said

already elsewhere about the tragedy of that day. The resulting chaos soon developed into a hunt for those responsible, and President Carter ordered military action into Afghanistan. The fight there was long and tough, with enemy combatants utilizing guerilla warfare techniques in conjunction with extreme use of telepathic counterintelligence, but eventually Coalition forces won through, leaving us to debate exactly how this had happened. Had our leaders failed us? Did the government know beforehand? Why weren't actions taken to prevent this? Unfortunately, we've since learned the lesson we feared all along: for every advantage we held, for every power we employed in our favor, al-Qaeda and its related allies anticipated our actions and responded in a fashion to obscure themselves from all of our technological and parahuman security measures.

In the growing shadow of our conflict in Afghanistan, United Nations inspectors brought forth ominous news from a nearby country: Saddam Hussein Hussein, clone of the original Iraqi dictator, refused to submit to inspections after allegations that Iraq held facilities capable of mass-producing cloned "parahumans." After much debate and protest, we finally went to war with them as well, although we're not currently faring as well against an organized national army as we did against the slightly less organized and effective forces of the Taliban. Our war with them wages on, but looks exceptionally promising for the future. However, citizens continue to voice protests back home that Carter is simply using this as a method to popularize himself and repeal the Twenty-Second Amendment, allowing him to run for a third term.

Though it may at times seem dark, the world is now advanced beyond our most fantastic dreams. We fly to work under our own volition, speak mind to mind over thousands of miles with minimal effort, and rebuild shattered homes and dreams as if it were child's play. Construction workers heft girders as if they are feathers, politicians win over the hearts and minds of their constituents with a smile, and astronauts routinely fly into orbit without any propulsion system. Humanity has spread to the lunar surface (at Tycho Colony), under the sea at Pacificus, and to the future (albeit on a criminal penal colony situated on Mars after the death of our sun). We're not just living our dreams, we're forging new ones every day.