

# COMPLICATIONS

Comic books are full of storylines involving personal complications, and players are encouraged to come up with some for their heroes. **Complications** have a specific use in the game as well: they give the Gamemaster a “handle” on your hero, different challenges to introduce or include in adventures. When the GM does so, you earn hero points you can use to enhance your character's chances of success, amongst other things. (See **Hero Points** in **The Basics** and **Action & Adventure** chapters for more information.)

## CHOOSING COMPLICATIONS

Choose at least two complications for your hero: a Motivation and at least one other. You can take as many complications as you wish, although the GM may set limits for the sake of being able to keep track of them all. Complications are also self-limiting, in that you only earn hero points for those complications that actually come into play. So even if you have more than a dozen, if the GM can only include a couple in a game session, then those are the ones that earn you hero points for that game. You can—and generally should—look for opportunities to include your hero's complications and offer suggestions to the GM, who makes the final decision on which complications come into play at any given time.

The GM also decides what complications are appropriate for the game and can overrule any particular complication, based on the style and needs of the story and the series. Keep in mind the adventure needs to have room for *all* of the heroes' complications, so individual ones can only come up so often.

## MOTIVATION

Every hero has something that drove him or her to become a hero in the first place—a motivation that keeps them going when things get tough. Sometimes motivation is the only difference between a hero and a villain. What made your hero decide to fight for justice rather than turning toward more selfish goals? How does it affect the hero's methods of fighting crime? Is there anything that might change or affect the hero's motivation?

Motivation is a complication because it often determines what a hero will do in a particular situation. The GM can use your hero's motivation to encourage certain actions, and enemies may do the same. When you properly play out your hero's motivation, even if it isn't necessarily the “smartest” thing to do, the GM awards you a hero point.

Common heroic motivations include the following:

- **Acceptance:** The hero feels different or isolated (perhaps for being a non-human in human society) and does good to gain the trust and acceptance of others and perhaps discover what it means to be human. Some such heroes see their powers as more of a curse than a blessing, but try to do some good with them while hoping and looking for a way to have a normal life.

- **Doing Good:** Some heroes fight the good fight simply because it's the right thing to do and they believe in doing the right thing no matter what. Their strong moral center may come from a good upbringing (or a bad one that showed them what *not* to do) or the guidance or inspiration of a mentor or idol.
- **Greed:** There are those motivated by nothing more than the opportunity to make a profit off their heroic careers. They may be mercenaries for hire or marketing machines who do good deeds but also rake in the proceeds from licensing fees and public appearances. More altruistic heroes tend to look down upon their profit-mongering peers.
- **Justice:** An overwhelming thirst for justice drives some heroes, a need to see the innocent protected and the guilty punished, even if they are beyond the reach of the law. These heroes walk a thin line. For some justice becomes a thirst for vengeance for injury done to the hero in the past, like the death of a loved one.
- **Patriotism:** Heroes are often devoted to the ideals of their home (or adopted) nation, and seek to serve that nation and its people with their abilities. Patriotic heroes are often honored as champions of their homelands, but it is the service, and not necessarily the recognition, that matters.
- **Recognition:** Some heroes just want recognition or attention, and dressing up in a bright costume and fighting crime is one surefire way to get people to notice you. The hero may be a shy nobody out of costume or a glory-hog who loves the spotlight.
- **Responsibility:** The responsibility of having great power can be a heavy burden but some heroes feel it is their duty to use the powers they've been given for the greater good. Oftentimes these heroes are trying to live up to an ideal like a mentor or a predecessor who inspired them.
- **Thrills:** For some the life of a superhero is all about excitement, thrills, danger, and challenge. These heroes are in it for the action more than anything else.

## MOTIVATION AND INFLUENCE

A shared motivation can create an empathic bond with others. With the GM's permission, you might get a circumstance bonus on interaction skill checks when dealing with someone with the same motivation as yours. Simi-

larly, you may suffer a circumstance penalty to interaction when dealing with characters of a strongly differing motivation.

## MOTIVATIONS AS DESCRIPTORS

At the GM's option motivation can function as a descriptor for powers (see **Descriptors**, page 152), allowing character to have a power affecting only subjects with a particular motivation, for example, or the ability to detect characters with a particular motivation (see **Detect**, page 105). Gamemasters should be very careful when applying power modifiers based on subjective qualities like motivation. An attack power affecting only "evil" targets, for example, is useless against inanimate objects, constructs, and animals (which cannot have such a quality) as well as "good" targets. It might also not affect characters without a specific evil motivation (such as selfish mercenaries, violent vigilantes, or despots devoted solely to order, but not "evil" per se).

## MOTIVATIONS AS ORIGINS

Some characters may derive their powers from their motivation in some way, such as heroes who draw strength from their convictions, faith, or morality. This provides a descriptor for those powers, but the hero may also suffer Power Loss (see page 28) from a change or wavering in motivation.

## MOTIVATIONS IN CONFLICT

A character with different motivations may find them in conflict from time to time. Such conflicts provide roleplaying opportunities and complications for players and story hooks for the Gamemaster. For example, a hero motivated by Patriotism may discover a secret government agency acting against the interests of justice in the world. What is stronger, the hero's patriotism or the desire to see the truth known and justice done? Some conflicts may even result in heroes changing motivations. See **Changing Complications**, in the following section, for more on this.

## OTHER COMPLICATIONS

Other possible complications, and their uses in adventures, include:

- **Accident:** You cause or suffer some sort of accident. Perhaps a stray blast damages a building or hurts an innocent bystander, your fire powers set off sprinkler systems, or you cause volatile chemicals to explode. A hero with this as a regular complication may be especially accident-prone, inexperienced with their powers, or even jinxed! The GM decides the effects of an accident, but they should be troublesome. Accidents can lead to further complications; perhaps the hero develops a guilt-complex, obsession, or phobia involving the accident.
- **Addiction:** You need something, whether for physical or psychological reasons. You'll go out of your way to satisfy your addiction, and being unable to satisfy it may lead to other complications, either involving your own faculties or your relationships with people. Several comic book heroes have struggled with various addictions and the effects on their lives.
- **Disability:** You are limited by a particular disability, such as being blind, deaf, or paraplegic. When your disability places serious challenges in your path, your complication comes into play. Many "disabled" heroes have powers or other compensations for their disabilities, such as a blind hero with other enhanced senses or a paraplegic who is a powerful psychic with matchless mobility of mind over body. Even though their powers sometime make up for their disability, this complication is still appropriate because they may have to deal with it from time to time.
- **Enemy:** You have an enemy, or enemies, trying to do you harm. The GM can have your enemy show up to cause you trouble, and adventures involving your enemy tend to be more complicated for you; even personal grudge-matches, if the enmity goes both ways. When having an enemy causes a particular problem for you (such as your enemy abducting a loved one or laying a trap for you), you get a hero point.
- **Fame:** You're a public figure, known almost everywhere you go, hounded by the media, swamped by fans and well-wishers, and similar problems, which create various complications.
- **Hatred:** You have an irrational hatred of something, leading you to actively oppose the object of your dislike in some way, no matter the consequences. Complications involving your hatred tend to overwhelm your better judgment.
- **Honor:** You have a strong personal code of honor. Generally this means you won't take unfair advantage of opponents or use trickery, but you can define the exact terms of your code with the GM. Your honor becomes a complication when it puts you in a bind or on the horns of a moral dilemma.
- **Identity:** Heroes often maintain secret identities, creating various complications as they try to keep them secret from friends and enemies alike. The dual-identity can even go beyond mere disguise for heroes who actually transform into a different persona, creating complications around controlling that transformation, or a lack of powers or abilities in one persona.
- **Obsession:** You're obsessed with a particular subject and pursue it to the exclusion of all else, which can create quite a few complications.
- **Phobia:** You're irrationally afraid of something. When confronted with it you have to fight to control your fear, causing you to hesitate, flee, or act irrationally.
- **Power Loss:** Certain circumstances cause some or all of your powers to fail or stop working, or rob you of them altogether. You might depend on particular objects others can steal or take from you, or lose your powers during the dark of the moon, or when exposed to exotic radiation. You may even simply lose faith in yourself, resulting in temporary weakness.

## UNDER THE HOOD: COMPLICATIONS AND UP-FRONT REWARDS

Some roleplaying game systems include complications, disadvantages, or similar problematic character traits which offer “bonus points” for *creating* the character; essentially, you get more points for your character's good traits when you take on some bad ones.

The problem with such “up-front” rewards for giving a character flaws is that the player gets all of the reward (the bonus design points) immediately, but the disadvantage only occasionally limits or affects the character, sometimes even randomly. Since there is only so much “screen time” in a game session, there is virtually no way for the GM to spotlight every one of every character's disadvantages, so some end up being worth “more” in the sense of reward in exchange for drawbacks. Plus, after they have “paid out” their initial benefit, front-loaded negative traits are nothing but a burden to the character from that point forward, leading players to try and avoid or mitigate them as much as possible.

Complications address this issue by having a “pay-as-you-go” approach: if the GM uses a complication in the game, and the player responds by going along with it, the player gets a reward in the form of a hero point. This means that although the hero has to deal with some “bad stuff” from time to time, there is an upside, and a reason for players to *want* their characters' complications to come into play! Why do powerful heroes lead such complicated lives? They need the points!

When this happens, and poses a challenge for you, your complication comes into play.

- **Prejudice:** You are part of a minority group subject to the prejudices of others, which create problems. Similarly, characters with unusual origins or appearance might face prejudice, such as a demonic-looking hero who is considered suspect. Some Gamemasters and gaming groups may prefer not to deal with issues of prejudice in their games, in which case the GM is free to ban this complication.
- **Quirk:** Complications can often come from various personality quirks: likes, dislikes, hobbies, neuroses, and so forth. For example, a hero might have the quirk of always leaving some sort of “calling card” for the authorities along with a captured criminal. That could become a complication if somebody else starts imitating it, or uses it to cause trouble for the hero.
- **Relationship:** The important people in a hero's life are a source of strength, but they can also complicate matters considerably. If they are not in on the hero's costumed identity, then there is juggling two lives and keeping loved ones safely in the dark. On the other hand, if the people in a hero's life do know the truth, they are in danger from the hero's foes and others seeking to find out.
- **Reputation:** You have a bad reputation, affecting what others think of you (whether you deserve it or not). Having someone adopt a bad attitude toward you because of your reputation is a complication. You might struggle to overcome your reputation, taking chances or facing difficulties others do not as a result.
- **Responsibility:** You have various demands on your time and attention. Responsibilities include family obligations, professional duties, and similar things. Failing to live up to your responsibilities can mean loss of relationships, employment, and other problems.
- **Rivalry:** You feel a strong sense of competition with a person or group and have to do your best to outdo your rival at every opportunity.
- **Secret:** You have something potentially damaging or embarrassing you're hiding from the world. The most common secret for Mutants & Masterminds

heroes is their true identity, but it could be a secret weakness (another complication) or some dark secret from your past. Occasionally, something (or someone) may threaten to reveal your secret.

- **Temper:** Certain things just set you off. When you lose your temper you lash out at whatever provoked you.
- **Weakness:** Some things can hurt you, badly. You might have a weakness that overcomes your normally strong defenses, like a werewolf is vulnerable to silver, or you may suffer harm from things that are harmless to others, from water to cold iron or exotic energies or materials. A weakness may add degrees of effect or impose an entirely different effect. Affliction (see the **Powers** chapter) is the typical effect, but some weaknesses inflict outright Damage, Weaken the target, or have some other effect. You and the GM can discuss common effects beforehand and it is up to the GM to decide what happens when the particular weakness comes into play. When the GM uses your weakness against you, it's a complication.

## CHANGING COMPLICATIONS

Complications can (and generally should) change over the course of a series: old enemies die or are put away for good, rivalries and psychological issues are resolved, new romances and relationships begin as others end, and so forth. Work with the GM to come up with new complications for your hero as old ones are resolved. As mentioned previously, the Gamemaster may set limits as to how many ongoing complications your hero can have in play at any given time.

## COMPLICATIONS AND INJURIES

Various challenges heroes face over the course of a story make suitable complications. For example, while the game rules don't have specific details for how to handle a hero with a concussion, it can make for an interesting story. The easiest way to handle it is as a complication: whenever the injury causes the hero trouble (a lost action due to dizziness, a villain getting away, etc.), the GM awards a hero point. You can do the same with anything from a malfunctioning device to a persistent distraction.