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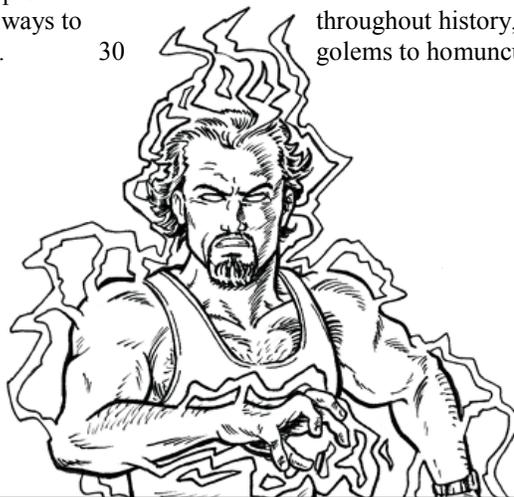
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## CONVENTIONS

Hero Games will be at these conventions. Stop by and visit the booth, and play in some games!

### PortCon

June 13-15  
Portland, ME  
[portconmaine.com](http://portconmaine.com)

### Origins

June 26-29  
Columbus, OH  
[originsgames.com](http://originsgames.com)

### GenCon Indy

July 24-27  
Indianapolis, IN  
[gencon.com](http://gencon.com)

### ConQuest

August 29-Sept 1  
Palo Alto, CA  
[con-quest.com](http://con-quest.com)



# Out of the Tavern, Onto the Road

 by Brenn Hill

You've seen it before. The GM prepares the greatest plot in the history of roleplaying. The players likewise create the most detailed, rich, and wonderful characters anyone could hope to play. They all sit down at the table and things go wrong. Without a strong opening and introduction, the carefully crafted creations of players and GMs alike go down in flames. To have a strong game, you need a strong beginning to unite the players and begin the story arc.

So where to begin? Lets start with a fairly stereotypical opening to an adventure where the GM tries to introduce his three characters – a knight, a street urchin, and a magician – to each other by putting them all in close proximity to a plot hook.

**Example:** *GM: "So, you are all in the local tavern when three large threatening men enter through the doorway...."*

At this point, the street urchin decides to take advantage of the distraction and pilfer what he finds off of the wealthiest looking person around, the magician. The noble knight sees this and rushes to arrest the poor urchin. The urchin, distracted by the knight fails his Sleight of Hand roll and alerts the magician, who mistakes the charging knight as an attempt on his life. Immediately, the magician unloads his powerful fireball spell into the room, roasting all the hapless peasants, igniting the tavern, and alerting the town guard with the massive explosion. At this point, the players have completely forgotten about the threatening men and spend their time fighting each other and bickering. In the meantime, the dragon they were supposed to be slaying is happily munching on the nearest available princess, and the evil necromancer is building his army of destruction unopposed. Perhaps this is exactly what the GM and players had in mind, but probably not. How can this situation be saved?

There are a large number of possible answers. Specifically, there are three main categories of solutions: character solutions, setting solutions, and in-game solutions. Character solutions are solutions involving the type of characters that are allowed into the game and the characters' backgrounds. Setting solutions are introductory settings that make it unlikely or impossible for the characters to start fighting among each other or leave the course the GM needs them to take. Finally, in-game solutions involve quick thinking on the part of GMs and players alike to ensure the game doesn't suddenly degenerate into yet another failed campaign.

## Character Solutions

Sometimes character concepts simply do not mix. Even if the characters are well designed and fleshed, they may not be able to get along. The knight and the street urchin form a good example. As the concepts stand, the two find it hard to like one another. What the characters need is a bridge, a way of getting past their differences so the game can move on. These bridges come in a variety of forms and are easy to insert into almost any character concept.

## THE COMMON HOMELAND

With this option, the players create characters who were all raised in the same place. This place should be small enough or close knit enough that it is reasonable for the characters to all know each other. A country is too big in general as are most cities, but a town or village is fine. If being in a large city is important, perhaps characters came from the same area. This would probably be some area that has a pet name such as "the gully" or "the docks." Think of Manhattan or the Bronx in New York city. The characters know the same people, have similar mannerisms, and may have even met each other before. The characters know how to interact and how not to get in each other's way. Beyond this, a common origin can serve as an aid to players to create rich backgrounds, particularly when the GM gives his players lots of detail about the area.

This method does have a disadvantage though. Some concepts are hard to fit together in this way. A thief may come from the slums but it is harder to fit in a wizard. However, just because the fit isn't obvious doesn't mean it can't work. For instance, perhaps the wizard is hiding in the slums after a failed experiment and has slowly adopted the local culture. Nevertheless, the GM and players may come across character concepts that they want in their game but cannot find a way to fit together in this way. Before the game begins, all the players and the GM should come together and discover to what extent this option is viable.

## THE COMMON JOB

Even if the players have characters from all over the globe or even the universe, it is possible that they could all end up doing the same job. Not a job like an armorer or blacksmith, but jobs such as administrators, guards, or any other sort of hireling, jobs that groups of people do. Generally, this method works very well for campaigns with an overall theme, such as war, love, or the unexplained. Not all characters need to have the same job because related jobs work

## Superpowers in Reality by Arthur Samuels

The *HERO System* defines two distinct types of games. One is “Superheroic,” where all equipment must be paid for with points (I’ve always wondered why supervillains rob banks in that game; they can’t possibly use the money for anything). The other is “Heroic,” where commonly available equipment can be bought with money, but the characters cannot buy Powers.

The first option reflects Silver Age comic-book heroics quite well. Captain America, Daredevil, Batman, and others would never go buy an ordinary handgun and carry it.

The second option is used for James Bond, *The Bourne Identity*, and so forth. The characters are definitely non-super and do not have to pay points for ordinary devices (other than skills and familiarities to be able to use them).

However, there does exist a hybrid type of genre. In some stories, characters do have superpowers, yet they exist in what is recognizably our world (with the minimum amount of unreality necessary for superbeings). In this “realistic supers” setting, it makes no sense to charge points to carry ordinary items and weapons. Such characters can and do use commonly available weapons and equipment without it recognizably being part of their “shtick” a la Batman’s utility belt.

Furthermore, not being able to buy and use ordinary items fails the reality check. Reality? For superheroes? Well, yes. The genre I am describing here is defined by taking the real world, injecting superpowered characters, and then exploring “what would it *really* be like?” Would they dress up in yellow spandex, form superteams, patrol the city for crime, and shout everything? Would you? Where do they get those costumes made? Where do they get them cleaned and repaired? Why would acquiring the ability to fly suddenly make it impossible for you to buy and learn to use a rifle?

A good example of this genre is the *Wild Cards* series, edited by George R. R. Martin. Steve Jackson Games’ *GURPS Wild Cards* is an excellent sourcebook for this series. In one of the stories, Billy Ray carries an Uzi. He has superhuman strength, speed, regeneration, and a natural fighting ability a match for any martial artist. However, when he needs to carry a gun, he just checks one out and straps it on (he works for the Justice Department, so he has the appropriate Perks). It does not carry the stigma of “wrongness” of Batman carrying a .45.

To represent this sort of gaming in the *HERO System* requires a hybrid approach combining elements of both Heroic and Superheroic games.

A typical arrangement would be 100 base points, plus 50 points in Disadvantages. These characters tend not to have the massive Disadvantage totals of the four-color characters. Note that this approach precludes a character with a massive variety of powers, unless they are at a low level. This is deliberate: this sub-genre tends to feature characters with one distinct superpower, or a tightly linked group of minor powers. Furthermore, most of their Characteristics tend to be in the human range. Just because you have acquired a STR of 40 does not mean you have Olympic level DEX and SPD – it just doesn’t follow.

Next, these characters can both buy Powers as though in a Superheroic game *and* buy mundane items with money (and associated skills such as Weapon Familiarity). At first glance, this may seem to make some Powers worthless. Why spend points on an EB or RKA when you can buy WF: Small Arms and carry an assault rifle?

However, the other aspects of realism must be taken into account. Set the campaign in any large American city. You try carrying an M-16 in downtown Los Angeles. See how long you manage it before the cops get real interested in why you are packing that much heat. Let me know how it goes, if you survive. Furthermore, where are you going to get something like that? Commonly, a natural 2d6 RKA is invisible until used, cannot be taken away, and is not illegal unless actually used, except in the most repressive countries.

Some players may want to make characters who are cops or Federal agents, just to get the appropriate Perks. This should be discouraged. Most of the time in this sub-genre, the paranormals are considered dangerous freaks and society has a hard time accepting them as authority figures.

The main difference between this style and the more standard Silver Age style power levels is the way the PCs have to interact with the “normals.” A 350- or even a 250-point super typically can ignore the authorities unless they use military force – and some supers can ignore them even then. However, 150-point paranormals are not above the law.

Now, it may seem that 150 points doesn’t even qualify as super. That’s due to overall point inflation. In most *HERO System* gaming, in my experience, the so-called “normals” seem to almost all be at the level of elite special forces. You never seem to see agents or cops who are not at least 100 points. Agents built on 150