

Table of Contents

HERO SANDWICH

THANKS FOR ALL THE FISH

Digital Hero closes its digital doors. Dave thanks all the authors, artists, and readers for their support. 2

HEROGLYPHS

See how Steve Long himself answers rules questions. This issue – eat away at Damage Over Time. 3

YOU GOTTA HAVE CHARACTER

Tom Horn was one of the last true cowboys. Plus, a tracker, hired gun, miner, and all-around Western Hero. 5

COOL STUFF

ALIEN ELITE

Samurais, ninja, special forces... Alien races have their equivalents, with specialized styles and equipment. 11

ATOMIC MONSTER HERO

Giant monsters come from space, from accidents, from all around us! Learn their ecologies, their origins, and their ways. 23

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

More Talents for your games. See ways to fight better, escape unharmed, and look good while doing it. 39

BLOOM OF THE TYGERLILY

TygerLily is a vigilante superhero. At least she will be, once she grows up. See how her childhood leads to her destiny. 44

REALISTIC MARTIAL ARTISTS

There are many kinds of martial artists, in terms of style, background, motivation, and other factors. 47

SECRET ORIGINS, PART 2

Times have changed, and so have the heroes and villains. See how the golden age clashes with modern times. 56

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Publisher

Hero Games

Editor

Dave Mattingly

Authors

Lisa Brown

Curtis Gibson

Bob Greenwade

Steven S. Long

Michael Satran

Michael Surbrook

Jason Walters

Artists

C. Jason Billbrey

James Dawsey

Cover

DT Butchino

Online

herogames.com

To Subscribe

herogames.com/digitalhero

PRINTING

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Atomic Monster HERO by Michael Surbrook

"Oh No, There Goes Tokyo!"

With a purposeful grimace and a
terrible sound
He pulls the spitting high tension wires
down
Helpless people on a subway train
Scream bug-eyed as he looks in on them
He picks up a bus and he throws it back
down
As he wades through the buildings
toward the center of town

Godzilla
Blue Öyster Cult

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

In 1954 Warner Brothers released *Them!*, one of the first "giant atomic monster" movies, and the studio's biggest moneymaker for the year. It also touched off a whole new film genre, with giant monsters popping up in the theaters with some regularity. Soon, movie-goers would be treated to gigantic spiders, scorpions, and preying mantises, as well as numerous immense radioactive dinosaurs awoken from epoch-long sleeps in polar ice. To top this trend off, 1956 saw the American release of *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* and introduced the world to 150 feet of prehistoric fury who flattened cities, armies, and anything else in his path with blasts of "Atomic Breath."

To our modern eyes, many of these films seem to be utterly cheesy, filled with strong-jawed military men who are doomed to fail in their battle against the giant monsters; pretty lab assistants, who always seem to be perfectly made up, and always fall when running from the atomic menace; and the true hero of the film – the lab coated scientist, who usually determines what the monster is and how to best destroy it. Along the way we, the viewers, are treated to often laughable special effects, wooden acting, and if we're lucky, scenes of the monster in question rampaging through a model city, wreaking havoc on a grand scale.

Of course, one needs to remember when these films were made. *Them!*, for example, might be considered a parable about communism mixed with a warning about the dangers of unregulated atomic experimentation. *Godzilla*, on the other hand, was meant from the start to be an allegory about the threat of nuclear warfare, inspired by director Ishiro Honda's memories of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Of course, not every such movie had a deeper message, and with the popularity of films like *Them!*, *Godzilla*, and *The Beast From*

20,000 Fathoms, other studios were quick to try and cash in on the giant monster craze, leading to some rather questionable efforts in the years to follow – such as *The Giant Gila Monster*, *The Black Scorpion*, and *The Killer Shrews*.

This article will take a look at the giant atomic monster genre, concentrating mostly on the output of Hollywood, as the Japanese *kaiju* ("mysterious creature") films are a genre all to themselves. Within the following paragraphs you'll find suggestions on how to design and develop your giant atomic monster, starting with its basic origins, the creature's weapons, and ways for the Player Characters to eventually destroy it. Several sample giant atomic monsters will finish the article, as well as some further resources for your reading and viewing enjoyment.

THE SCIENCE OF ATOMIC MONSTERS

Before we get started, let's take a moment to consider how exactly, an atomic monster works. Is it possible to have a creature hundreds of feet long, invulnerable to bombs and guns, and able to survive untold millennia encased in ice? Simply put – no.

The average atomic monster is the perfect example of "rubber science." While many elements of the monster may be based on fact (okay, *some* of the elements), much of it is pure fallacy, clothed in just enough technobabble to sound good. Stating the monster is a relic from the age of the dinosaurs usually helps account for its size, having it frozen alive in ice lets it be millions of years old, and gaps in the fossil record explains why we've never seen something like this before. As for the fire breath? Oh that's easy....

RADIATION EXPLAINS EVERYTHING!

That's right, radiation. The 1950s was the Atomic Age, and atomic power was the way of the future. Thus, atomic radiation became the answer to any problem. Radiation made things grow into monsters, but could also destroy said monsters. Radioactive isotopes could be used to create all sorts of serums, some of which would create horrid mutations, or cure them. Harnessing certain forms of radiation allowed man to create death rays, propulsion systems for aircraft and space ships, shrink rays, enlarging rays, medical scanners, and whatever else a Hollywood writer could dream up. So when the time comes to unleash an atomic monster on the heroes, don't bother thinking too deeply about how the creature got the way it did. Simply announce 'it's radioactive' and you're all set.

artwork by C. Jason Bilbrey

KAIJU?

Kaiju is a Japanese word meaning "mysterious creature" or "weird beast." It is used to describe the creatures who appear in live-action *tokusatsu* ("special effects") films (such as *Kamen Rider* or *Ultraman*). Western viewers are usually more familiar with the *daikaiju* ("big monsters"), such as *Godzilla* and *Gamera*. While nominally modeled after real-world animals, many *kaiju* (and especially *daikaiju*) are utterly bizarre in appearance and behavior. Usually hundreds of feet high (or long) and weighing tens of thousands of tons, *daikaiju* are immensely strong and powerful, nigh invulnerable (except to each other), and equipped with all sorts of weapons. Fiery breath, laser-beam eyes, spinning buzz saws for hands, blasts of wind, bolts of electricity – *daikaiju* have used all of these attack forms and more. When creating your own *daikaiju* feel free to give it just about any sort of attack you can think of; odds are, someone in Japan has already designed one just like it.

Realistic Martial Artists

by Michael Surbrook

The term “martial artist” usually brings to mind the image of lean Asian man dressed in a loose tunic and trousers who can break boards and bones with equal skill and efficiency. But that doesn’t always have to be the case. A martial arts-based character can appear in almost any setting, campaign, time period, or genre. All it requires is a logical mixture of background, personality, and martial arts style. This article presents three such martial artists, designed to be “realistic” (as defined on page 7 of *Ninja Hero*) with regards to power level and skill. The characters are, in order of point totals: Ray Carmichael, an young inner-city boxer; Marcellin Guiscard, highly-enthusiastic French Musketeer; and Wolfram von Ostheim, a towering *Landsknechte*, a 16th Century German mercenary.

Ray Carmichael

Background/History: When you’re a black youth growing up in Watts district of Los Angeles your prospects are few. Here, violence is almost a way of life, and street gangs can be found on every corner, dealing drugs and bullets in equal amounts. Joining a gang is almost a requirement if you expect to survive, and an early death from gang-related violence is a far to common result.

For Ray Carmichael this was his future. At least for a while. He ran with a gang. he carried a gun and a knife, and made sure no one, and that meant *no one*, dis’ed him or his homies. This was his life and he liked it -- until one of his best friends died in his arms after a fight with another gang. Standing there, covered in blood, Ray made a vow to himself. He was going to get out.

A few days later, Ray ended up at a local gym. There he struck up a deal with the manager. He’d help out around the gym, doing odd jobs, and in return he’d be trained in the art of boxing, as part of a local youth program. He quickly became an adept at the “sweet science” and has started to make a name for himself in Los Angeles amateur boxing circles.

Personality/Motivation: Ray is young man with a mission. Although only 19, he’s all ready decided on his future plans; which in his case involves becoming a champion amateur boxer, trying for the Olympic team, and then going pro. Thus, most everything he does is meant to future this aim. He works out constantly, both through weight training and in the ring, and often joins pickup basketball games to improve his reflexes and footwork. The only drawback to this whole plan is that Ray may be a little *to* dedicated to his dream, to the point where he has dropped out of school, and doesn’t look after his family like he should. To make matters worse, his younger brother has joined a street gang, while his old gang has started to pressure him to rejoining.

Quote: “I’m gonna punch my way outta Watts, and ain’t nobody gonna stand in my way!”

Powers/Tactics: Ray is both strong and fast, a dangerous combination in boxing. When in the ring he likes to stay close to his opponent, wearing them down with rapid combinations of Crosses and Jabs. If pressed, Ray will pull his arms in tight and go on the defensive, blocking his opponent’s blows with a tactic he calls “Rope-a-Dope” in honor of boxing great Muhammad Ali. Only when a foe is sufficient tired and worn out will Ray throw at Hook, often putting his levels into doing more damage when he does so.

Campaign Use: Ray is a fairly straightforward character, and can be dropped into most modern-day campaigns with ease. He works well as an NPC in *Champions* or *Dark Champions* games, and with a little editing could even be made into a character’s DNPC (especially if that character is of the “urban superhero” type). If you want, he could even be turned into a superhero himself (or a supervillain if your so inclined).

For a more powerful version of Ray, give him STR 20, DEX 20, CON 18, and a 4 SPD. Add a few levels with Boxing and even a Damage Class (if needed). For a weaker (or younger) Ray, drop his STR to 15, his DEX to 14, his CON to 14, and eliminate his skill levels.

Appearance: Ray stands 5’8” and weighs a well-muscled 151 pounds. He keeps his head shaved and tends to go shirtless when working out or training at the gym. In the ring he wears shorts, a tank top, boxing gloves, and protective headgear. Out of the ring he wears clothing typical of “inner-city” black youths.