

# SHADOWRUN SUPPLEMENTAL



## A SHORT GUIDE TO SUPERHEROIC ROLEPLAYING IN SHADOWRUN BY PATRICK GOODMAN

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## FROM THE EDITOR...

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Welcome to 2005! Our first release of the year — an essay from Patrick Goodman on running superheroic campaigns within the Sixth World!

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# SUPERHEROIC ROLEPLAYING IN SHADOWRUN

**"THERE AIN'T ALL THAT MUCH DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A LONG  
TRENCHCOAT AND A CAPE, ANYWAY." – FRANK MILLER**

**"WELCOME TO THE FUTURE." – MAGNETO (BRYAN SINGER'S X-MEN)**

*It was a cool night, and there was a chilly breeze blowing in from the coast. Thunder was glad she was wearing the long black trenchcoat Keith had given her a few months ago. Even if it hadn't been lightly armored, she would have been happy to have it to turn away the chill.*

*She sat on the edge of the roof, looking out over the slums of southern Houston from atop her ten-story apartment building. So far, it had been a quiet night, which didn't hurt her feelings all that much. She looked up at the sky, letting herself get lost in the scattering of stars that she could see over the city lights and the haze in the air. She tried to pick out constellations, but she had never been very good at that. She just liked the pretty lights in the sky.*

*Her reverie was broken by the city spirit she had roaming her neighborhood. "Sorry to interrupt," it said, its voice as gentle and cool as the breeze from the bay, "but there's trouble a few blocks west of here. Six big, one little."*

*She stood, looked at the spirit, and said, "Take me there, please." In an instant, she was flying west, the spirit's form holding her aloft as easily as she would hold a doll. She pointed to a roof overlooking the alley the spirit had indicated, and it set her down gently on the edge.*

*It was a blind alley; in the sputtering illumination of a dying streetlight, Thunder could see a small knot of young men and women surrounding someone at the closed end. It was a woman, begging them not to hurt her. Thunder shook her head at the scene three stories below her. "So tonight's dragons are gangbangers. Ours not to reason why, I suppose." She raised her right hand to her chest and stroked the small white shield, the size of her hand, sewn to the left breast of her trenchcoat, the white shield with the red cross of St. George emblazoned on it. It was the only bit of color on the garment. "Help me with this," she said reverently.*

*She stepped to the very edge of the roof and touched the gold bracelet on her right wrist; it began to glow very faintly. Turning to the spirit, she said, "Stick around; I might need your help." The spirit faded from view without an acknowledgment, but Thunder could still sense its presence; it would be there for her if she needed it. She unbuttoned her trenchcoat, made sure her tomahawks were in easy reach on her belt, and leapt from the edge of the roof into the darkness of the alley. The levitation spell held within her bracelet kept her from splattering on the pavement three stories below her. She stretched her arms out, sideways, and the tails of her trenchcoat billowed in the wind like ebony wings.*

*She stopped not quite a meter above the alley floor. Hovering there, her shaggy blonde hair blowing in the breeze, she watched as one of the thugs, her gang colors impossible to discern in the gloom, noticed her silhouette in the sputtering light. With as menacing a tone as the Dragonslayer could muster, Thunder said, "Leave. Her. Alone."*

*The rest of the gang spun around, ignoring the woman they'd been accosting, who fearfully backed up into a corner of the blind alley. The punks started to advance on her, hooting and hollering about the fool who'd just interrupted their business dealings. Thunder floated the rest of the way to the ground as she cracked her knuckles and the gangers began to close the distance.*

*She smiled. It was time to go to work.*

# SUPERHEROIC ROLEPLAYING IN SHADOWRUN



The streets of nearly any city in the world of Shadowrun are dark and forbidding places, decaying mazes of despair and greed where human predators stalk the night, preying on those weaker than themselves. It's a world where kindness and decency have largely been bred out of humanity, where fear and decay color every decision, where hope has become an endangered species. People are desperate, crying out for a hero.

Maybe that hero is you. Think you're up to the job?

## GIANTS AMONG MEN: THE CASE FOR SUPERHEROES IN THE WORLD OF SHADOWRUN

**"WE MUST NOT REMIND THEM THAT GIANTS WALK THE EARTH." — SUPERMAN (FRANK MILLER, THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS)**

Why run a superhero game using the Shadowrun game world? Surely, you say, there are better games out there for those kinds of character types, and you'd be right; Hero Games' *Champions*, Guardians of Order's *Silver Age Sentinels*, and Green Ronin's *Mutants & Masterminds* all come immediately to mind. As an alternate style of campaign, though, superheroes in Shadowrun offer tremendous opportunities for roleplaying that might not be so easily explored in another game system.

On a more practical level, this sort of campaign is ideal for groups whose players can't always make it on a consistent basis, or if there are only a couple of players to begin with. You can easily run a superheroic Shadowrun game with only a GM and a single player. This type of campaign can easily scale from one character to an entire team of heroes spread across multiple locales, making it an excellent campaign model for groups whose players can't always attend from one session to another.

If a world ever needed heroes, the dark, grim cityscapes of the Sixth World need them. Megacorporations rule the world with crushing disregard for the common man, driven only by the soulless bottom line. The national governments are pale shadows of their former selves, providing only the simplest of services for their citizens. Law enforcement is provided by private corporations who turned in the lowest bid, and don't have the ability or the desire to protect any but the wealthiest of neighborhoods.

The streets of Seattle in 2064 are no different, really, from the streets in Tim Burton's *Batman*, or James O'Barr's *The Crow*. The only thing separating the Redmond Barrrens of Shadowrun and the Gotham City of Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* is the presence of magic. On these crowded, filthy streets, wars are waged every day. The megacorps wage war with one another, organized crime rings wage war with one another, street gangs wage war with one another. Unable to count on the low-bid protection of the security companies and unable to afford their own private armies to protect themselves, the average citizens on the street are caught in the middle. More than

ever before, the common people need someone willing and courageous enough to stand up against the evils of the world.

They need heroes.

That's where the player characters come in. At the most basic level, a superhero is a man or a woman with powers and abilities that the average person doesn't possess, who uses those abilities for the benefit of others. Those powers can be mystical in origin, like an adept's powers or a magician's spells, or they could be technological, by way of cybernetics or advanced weaponry. They could even be as simple as an extensive array of skills and contacts.

Player characters are typically above average in any role-playing game, and this is just as true in Shadowrun as it is in other games. In fact, any starting PC in Shadowrun could be a beginning superhero, waiting to right his first wrong. So it's not just about what you've got. It's about what you do with it. Being a hero is more than just having power; it's about being willing to use that power for something other than personal gain. It's about attitude.

## HEROIC CHARACTERS

**"SURE WE'RE CRIMINALS. WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN CRIMINALS. WE HAVE TO BE CRIMINALS." — BATMAN (FRANK MILLER, THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS)**

**"WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY." — BEN PARKER (STAN LEE, THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN)**

At its essence, Shadowrun is a game about criminals, out for themselves on the cruel streets of a dystopian future. They lie, steal, cheat, and kill to carry out the missions given to them by their anonymous employers. As they go about their business, shadowrun by shadowrun, they further fray the edges of the fabric of civilized society. Day by day, they make things worse, intentionally or otherwise.

As an alternative to the standard campaign, why not turn that around? Suppose that instead of working for one megacorp against another, they chose to battle crime in the street, in the places where Lone Star and Knight Errant feared to tread? Suppose they made a stand and tried to make things better, even on a small scale, rather than worse?

It's not as difficult as you might think to incorporate this kind of play into Shadowrun and have it remain Shadowrun. Being a superhero doesn't equal being a bright, sunshiny nice guy; Batman, for instance, while undeniably a hero, isn't necessarily a fun guy to hang out with. Your characters don't need to be nice guys to be good guys. Shadowrunners are criminals by definition, after all, and the same can be said for superheroes. They're vigilantes, operating outside the law, often taking it into their own hands and dispensing justice as they see fit. Heroes, however, are doing this for reasons other than profit. So why do it? It's every man for himself in the Sixth World, isn't it? That's what sets heroes apart from shadowrunners; they see past themselves. Why take on the fool's errand of making things better? Well, that all depends on the hero and his psychological archetype.

# SUPERHEROIC ROLEPLAYING IN SHADOWRUN

## HEROIC ARCHETYPES

***“YOU KNOW WHAT THE SCARIEST THING IS? TO NOT KNOW YOUR PLACE IN THIS WORLD. TO NOT KNOW WHY YOU’RE HERE.” — ELIJAH PRICE (M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN’S UNBREAKABLE)***

Some heroes are Seekers of Justice. These characters are out to make the wrong things right, whether they are avenging wrongs done to them personally or avenging wrongs done to others. They’re not particularly interested in the law; they’ll abide by it if it works to their advantage, but they’ll likewise toss it out the window if it gets in their way. As the name implies, characters like this are more interested in justice. They are more interested in avenging evil and punishing the guilty, and they’re typically unafraid to use lethal force when they feel it necessary. There is a lot of room in Shadowrun for this sort of character; there is a lot of injustice in the streets of most sprawls. Classic examples of Seekers of Justice include Batman, the Crow, the Punisher, and the Shadow.

Other heroes are Protectors. Protectors are motivated by their desire to help the helpless, to stand up for the little guy in the face of overwhelming odds. Most of them try to obey and uphold the law but by their very nature and actions they frequently violate it, however unwittingly. They avoid the use of lethal force in all but the most extreme cases. In many ways, Protectors are benign versions of Seekers of Justice; both have similar goals, but different methods. As with Seekers of Justice, there is a lot of room in the world of Shadowrun for Protectors. Classic Protector heroes include Superman, Hellboy, and Spider-Man.

Another kind of hero is the Visionary. The Visionary character is out to make the world a better place for everyone, though they usually have a particular group of the oppressed that they try and support. They want things to be better than they are, and they work to actively pursue this goal. Of all the heroic archetypes, the Sixth World might need this one the most. Crushing oppression is everywhere, and violence in its pursuit has become the norm. One of the classic Visionaries in comics is Professor Charles Xavier, while as a unit the most famous group of Visionaries is the X-Men.

Finally, there are the Thrillseekers. These heroes are out, not necessarily for a cause, but for the sheer adrenaline rush of busting heads and making smart remarks. They’re looking to take the mundane banality out of their lives, and if they do some good in the process, so much the better. Some notable Thrillseekers in the comics include the Green Arrow and Superman’s clone, Superboy.

## SHADOWRUNNERS AS SUPERHEROES

***“THERE’S NOT MANY PEOPLE THAT’LL UNDERSTAND... PEOPLE LIKE US.” — WOLVERINE (BRYAN SINGER’S X-MEN)***

***“I’M JUST AN ORDINARY MAN.” — DAVID DUNN (M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN’S UNBREAKABLE)***

Almost any kind of Shadowrun character can be used as a superhero. Race is not an issue; a hero can be an ork or an elf, a troll or a dwarf. Background doesn’t matter, nor does how much money a person has. You can be rich like Bruce Wayne or broke like Peter Parker and still be a hero. As we’ve seen, all it takes is a reason.

The most common Shadowrun archetypes to take up the superhero mantle are street samurai and adepts. Many of these characters concentrate on combat, and there’s a lot of fighting going on in comics. But there’s room for other kinds of characters. Magicians of all stripes become heroes, too; while many of the threats to our way of life come from the streets of our own world, some also come from astral space and beyond.

You don’t have to have superhuman strength and speed to be a hero, though. Some of the pre-made characters in *Shadowrun 3rd Edition*, such as the Face or the Investigator, can also be effective heroes, not because of their combat prowess, but because of their skills or their web of contacts. Even riggers and deckers can get in on the act; though these character types are typically portrayed in the comics and movies in a supporting role, nothing is written in stone to keep you from giving them the spotlight. It could even be an interesting variation on a variation, having an all-decker superhero team.

For those who prefer to start from scratch, it’s even easier, since you can tailor your hero your way. Any of the various character generation methods offered for the game will work, though it’s been my experience that the point system from the *Shadowrun Companion* is probably the best because of its flexibility. It also makes it easy for the GM to tailor the PCs to the power level he wants to adopt.

Power level is one of the things that make running superheroes in Shadowrun kind of tricky. The system can only comfortably handle a certain level of power before it begins to become unwieldy; there are only so many dice you can roll at one time before you begin to feel the urge to smash them all with a hammer. This is one of the reasons that many GMs interested in this sort of campaign would stay closer to street level, letting their players be the Batmen and Daredevils of their worlds. That being said, though, you can still play a fairly powerful game within the confines of the Shadowrun system if you want to do so. Modeling Superman in Shadowrun would be a bit of a pain, for instance, but it would be fairly easy to adapt most of the X-Men.

# SUPERHEROIC ROLEPLAYING IN SHADOWRUN



Once the starting power level has been decided, players should be ready to build their characters. You can legitimately run a superhero-style campaign with a basic starting character built from only 120 build points, which should appeal to those striving for a street-level grittiness. Those desiring a little more spectacle to start with might want to use the high-power character generation rules found in *Mr. Johnson's Little Black Book*, pp. 118-19.

You can't have a superhero game without super powers. Fortunately for all involved, Shadowrun comes completely stocked with a wide range of them. Many superpowers, at the heart of things, are just amplifications of normal human abilities. Cyberware and bioware can be the source for many of the superpowers seen in comics.

For those not wanting to go the cybernetic route, there's always magic. Large numbers of the characters in a Shadowrun game are magical in nature. Magicians can bring incredible power to bear in the form of spells and magical foci; they also have the ability to call spirits and elementals to aid them. In the opening story, for instance, Thunder has a city spirit assisting her, and uses an anchoring focus for levitating herself into the alley. Magicians looking into cleaning up the street shouldn't, as sometimes happens, overlook these aspects of their abilities. Spellcasters, of course, aren't the only magical heroes out there. Adepts, more than any other Shadowrun archetype, are tailor-made to become superheroes. Most adept powers are essentially superpowers already. Others can be used as such by creative players.

There's also the great equalizer: SURGE. Sudden Recessive Genetic Expression can give anybody superpowers, be they man or woman, elf or ork. Anyone can suddenly have the strength of a troll, or the ability to breathe underwater. The possibilities aren't necessarily limited to the SURGE traits mentioned in *Year of the Comet*, either. Gamemasters and players alike are encouraged to get creative, even wild, with possible SURGE-based powers (having it grant spell-like abilities or critter powers, for instance).

Another approach, one on the other end of the spectrum, is to have a superhero without any superpowers at all. Like the Batman before them, they're ordinary men and women with extraordinary skills and a dedication to match. Heroes with a wide array of skills and little to nothing in the way of actual superpowers are very well suited to a street-level hero campaign, so players inclined toward this sort of character should be encouraged to go for it.

There's at least one more way to make the game more superheroic, if the GM is willing to take the risk. This is to get rid of Attribute Maximums. If a Human character wants to build himself up to a Strength of 12, let him. It should still cost the same amount of Karma that any attribute above the Racial Modified Limit would cost, but he should be allowed to do so if he wants (and, of course, if he has a valid in-game rationale). If the GM wanted to maintain tighter control on this option, he could consider raising the Karma multiplier for raising the attribute even higher, from 3x to 4x the rating to which the Attribute is being raised. This will allow for

superhuman attributes, but will also help to keep them rare.

Once you have superpowers for your characters, you need to have a background. While it's not absolutely necessary to have each character's origin story acted out in a game session, all the players should have some sort of background for their characters. In this sort of game more than many others, it's important to know where the hero came from and why he does what he does. The good thing about this is that all those lame canards many players come up with, such as being an ex-special forces operative with millions of nuyen worth of cyberware who escaped from a top-secret government- or corporate-sponsored experimental super-soldier team, are perfectly valid in a superhero-style campaign. What's even better is that the gamemaster can make them pay for it later, when the aforementioned top-secret corp-sponsored experimental super-soldier team comes looking for their wayward property.

## HEROIC SITUATIONS ON THE STREETS OF SHADOWRUN

***"REMEMBER THAT HOPE IS A GOOD THING, RED, MAYBE THE BEST OF THINGS, AND NO GOOD THING EVER DIES." – ANDY DUFRESNE (STEPHEN KING, "RITA HAYWORTH AND THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION")***

***"GUESS IT'S NOT A GOOD DAY TO BE A BAD GUY, HUH, SKANK?" – ERIC DRAVEN (ALEX PROYAS' THE CROW)***

So ... now you've got a character. He's got superpowers. He's got a backstory. He might even have a funny costume, and a colorful street-name that strikes fear into the hearts of his enemies.

Now what?

The vast majority of your prototypical shadowruns can be used for heroic adventure seeds. After all, just because someone can be paid to perform an act for criminal reasons doesn't mean they can't do the same thing for heroic reasons. Important people always need bodyguards, for instance, whether they realize it or not. Superheroes frequently perform this sort of mission. They're also called upon to rescue kidnapping victims, which are essentially extraction runs with a heroic veneer placed on them.

As has been noted elsewhere, there's not much of a difference between a shadowrunner and a superhero, so it shouldn't be much of a surprise that most superheroic adventure ideas are shadowruns in reverse, and often they're not even in reverse. Bodyguard jobs and extractions have been noted, but aren't the only activities out there. Datasteals where the heroes have to retrieve some important piece of data that could endanger large numbers of people aren't unheard of, nor are courier jobs where the heroes have to transport a vital piece of equipment. In fact, almost any shadowrun, even an assassination, could be used as the basis for a superheroic adventure.

# SUPERHEROIC ROLEPLAYING IN SHADOWRUN

Making a living shouldn't be as big a deal for most superhero-oriented campaigns as it might be in a more conventional Shadowrun game. Many heroes have independent means of supporting themselves, though some (like Spider-Man, for instance) have to keep day jobs. Many superheroes, though, have patrons, wealthy individuals who provide the heroes with a means to support themselves and still devote themselves to fighting crime on a day-to-day basis. Many gamemasters might like this option, since it can simultaneously cut down on some of the bookkeeping during the game and give the GM a means of keeping his players in line. If the heroes start to stray too far off the path, their sponsor might withdraw his support, for example. The sponsor can, himself, serve as a means for coming up with adventures. If he's a secretive sort, he might have the heroes divert attention away from him in some fashion so that his involvement in a "vigilante organization" is kept secret. On the other hand, he might be willing to sacrifice his secrecy for questionable reasons, and try and use his team to fulfill a personal vendetta.

So there you have it. You have the makings for a very different kind of Shadowrun game at the tips of your fingers. So what are you waiting for? Your city needs heroes.

It's time to go to work.

## MARVELS: FILMS AND BOOKS TO INSPIRE YOUR HEROES

**"THERE ARE MORE THINGS IN HEAVEN AND  
EARTH, HORATIO, THAN ARE DREAMT OF IN YOUR  
PHILOSOPHY." – HAMLET (WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,  
HAMLET, ACT I, SCENE 5)**

Superhero comics have been around for over seventy years, and while some of them have always had dark overtones, it is only in the past twenty years or so that really dystopic superhero comics have come into their own. These are typically the ones you should read to get a feel for how superheroes could interact with a dark future like the Sixth World.

Of all the writers in recent years to shake up the field of comics, no one has had more of an impact with this sort of story than Frank Miller. His stories are harsh tales of the women and men who wear the masks, and how their flaws, rather than keeping them from being heroes, actually make them greater heroes. Some of Miller's best work includes *Daredevil: Born Again* and *Elektra: Assassin*. His most famous work, however, is probably his Batman trilogy, *Batman: Year One*, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, and *Batman: The Dark Knight Strikes Again*. Even if you're not planning on running a superhero-style campaign, it won't hurt you to take a look at these books, or to seek out other Frank Miller titles like *Ronin* or *Sin City*.

Frank Miller, of course, doesn't own the market on dark heroes. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons more or less invented the graphic novel, and a significant chunk of the concept of dark heroes, when they gave us *The Watchmen*, a grim little tale of what happens when ordinary people with extraordinary powers choose to take Destiny into their own hands. Mark Waid and Alex Ross tell a similar tale from a different perspective in their alternate future epic *Kingdom Come*.

One can't discuss the dark side of superheroes without mentioning James O'Barr's *The Crow*. This bleak, sometimes semi-autobiographical, tale of love and vengeance from beyond the grave was one of the first of the independent comics to move beyond mere darkness and oppression to show the essential humanity of its leading character. This is another book that should be read by anybody playing *Shadowrun*, whether it's a superhero-inspired campaign or not. O'Barr's characters and his city streets provide a superb example of *noir* atmosphere that would serve any *Shadowrun* environment well.

Finally, though they don't provide the harsh, street-level feel of many of the previous examples, the trilogy of *The Death of Superman*, *World Without a Superman*, and *The Return of Superman* provide sterling examples of how a hero should act, how far some are willing to go to fight the good fight, and how much of an impact one man can really have on a world that needs a hero.

If you're more into motion pictures than comics themselves, there are a number of inspirational films that should help you put superheroes in your game's sprawls. Probably the darkest of these, and one of the finest comic adaptations ever made, is *The Crow*, directed by Alex Proyas. In this film, Proyas somehow manages to take O'Barr's dirty Detroit streets and make them even grimmer, but at the same time, he adds elements of hope to the characters, making it a truly human story in spite of the supernatural nature of its hero. Brandon Lee, in his final role, is mesmerizing as Eric, the title character, and demonstrates a range of skill both as an actor and a martial artist that would have been fascinating to watch grow. The extended fight scene in the conference room towards the end is worth the price of the rental all by itself, but the whole movie overall is well worth seeing.

Two more forbidding visions for superheroes on film are *Batman* and *Batman Returns*, both directed by Tim Burton. Don't taint yourself with the two Joel Schumacher efforts that followed these; those were the demise of the franchise, and hearkened more to the television show from the 1960s than the Dark Knight of the 1980s. Burton's films, though, gave us a black, malignant Gotham City that needed a Batman, a dark hero willing to operate outside the law to see justice done. The buildings are tall and Gothic, the shadows are dark and gloomy, and the feeling of oppression shown in the film is all but palpable.

# SUPERHEROIC ROLEPLAYING IN SHADOWRUN



Angst. Vampires. Kick-ass martial arts and the adepts who use them. A vampire-hunting anti-hero. All of these add up to *Blade*, *Blade II*, and *Blade Trinity* directed by Stephen Norrington, Guillermo del Toro, and David S. Goyer, respectively. Wesley Snipes as the title character is a vicious piece of work, bent on saving the world from a menace it doesn't even know exists. The action takes place in subways, sewers, and industrial dance clubs, and could be happening in the deepest shadows of your *Shadowrun* game already.

Another *noir-ish* classic for the more supernaturally inclined is *The Shadow*, starring Alec Baldwin and directed by Russell Mulcahy. Set in the den of sin that is 1930s New York City, Baldwin plays a tortured hero who knows the evil that lurks in the hearts of men, for it lurks in his own heart as well. The atmosphere is alternately dark and grand, with the kind of lush visuals and dramatic entrances that belong in the best kinds of role-playing sessions.

For those who prefer things low-key and street level, you can't do much better than the superhero origin story told in M. Night Shyamalan's *Unbreakable*. Bruce Willis stars as David Dunn, a security guard who discovers his powers after an almost unspeakable tragedy, and spends most of the film hiding from them and denying their existence. He turns in a superb performance, as does Samuel L. Jackson as the man who helps him discover and hone his abilities.

Also in the "little guy overcoming the overwhelming" category is Kinka Usher's *Mystery Men*. A comic romp about a team of low-rent superhero wannabes living in the shadow of their city's sanctioned and sponsored hero, *Mystery Men* manages to inject humor into the genre without becoming self-referential and self-parodying, which is a great risk when putting the genre on film. Besides, you just about have to have fun when you have a villain named Casanova Frankenstein.

Let's go back to the spectacular for a moment. The finest comics adaptations of late have been of Marvel Comics properties, and some of the finest of those have been *X-Men* and *X2: X-Men United*, both directed by Bryan Singer, and *Spider-Man* and *Spider-Man 2*, both directed by Sam Raimi. These films all treat their source material with enormous respect, and as a result we are treated to heroes who are truly heroic, but human at the same time. The two *X-Men* films have the most to offer in terms of *Shadowrun*-like grim atmosphere, while the *Spider-Man* films offer heroic attitude to spare.

As an example of how deckers can be superheroes, there's nothing better to watch than the Wachowski Brothers' epic *The Matrix*. Out in the real world, Morpheus, Neo, and the crew of the *Nebuchadnezzar* are deckers penetrating the ultimate in ultraviolet super-systems. Within the alternate reality of the Matrix, they become the ultimate adepts, able

to ignore some of the laws of nature as they fight to save humanity. The atmosphere is not as dark in places as some *Shadowrun* players would like, but the action and the attitude more than make up for it.

And once again, we end the list with the Last Son of Krypton. While the atmosphere is all wrong for any but the most optimistic of *Shadowrun* games, *Superman: The Movie* and *Superman II*, both directed by Richard Donner, provide a remarkable example of what a hero really is, how a hero behaves, and the lengths he could be willing to go to.

If you're interested in looking at other superhero roleplaying games, to see how others have handled it in the past, you're also in luck. Superhero RPGs are in the midst of a comeback. Currently on the shelves are three systems that have drawn enormous industry praise. The first of these is the granddaddy of them all, Hero Games' *Champions*, and its most appropriate sourcebook, *Dark Champions*. The game itself offers a rich background that's grown and evolved over twenty years of nearly continuous development, and the underlying system can support nearly any power level. The *Dark Champions* sourcebook is dedicated to street-level anti-heroes, and is virtually a must-read for someone wanting to run a heroic campaign in a dark world.

Also on the market is Guardians of Order's *Silver Age Sentinels*. As the title implies, it hearkens back to the Silver Age of comics and superheroes, a simpler time when the heroes were perhaps a bit purer. This does not, however, mean it's not meant for a modern age of moral ambiguity and vigilantism; it knows the difference between aspiring to the ideals of the Silver Age and actually being a part of the Silver Age.

The newest kid on the superhero RPG block is *Mutants & Masterminds*, by Green Ronin Publishing. Using an innovative take on the D20 system, *Mutants & Masterminds* is a fast-paced approach to superhero gaming, which allows you to model almost any kind of hero. The recent *M&M* sourcebook *Noir* offers a nicely detailed gaming city right out of any number of *film noir* classics...or the pages of a Frank Miller comic book.

For those more interested in harsher fare, Alderac Entertainment Group's now-defunct *Brave New World* was about as dystopic as you could get. A modern-day story set in a world gone horribly wrong, *Brave New World* showed heroes fighting the good fight even as the world tried to snuff them out. Another gritty superhero world is White Wolf's *Aberrant*, a near-future world where some of the world's superheroes, all of them created by a dreadful nuclear accident, try to change their world for the better...or else.

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