CAMPAIGNING

Across the years of playing, my players and I have run into a lot of interesting situations and difficult problems. Sometimes we've figured out how to solve them; sometimes we've figured out how to spot them ahead of time; sometimes we haven't been able to do a thing about them.

So let's discuss some of those situations, then talk about ways for you to apply the solutions when using *Strike Force* in your own campaign.

THE DEVELOPING CAMPAIGN

Let's say that you've just recently purchased *Champions*, gotten players together, and designed characters and a campaign background. Now what?

THE "CHARACTER STORY"

One thing that each *Champions* GM needs to learn to do is to spot, carefully nurture and eventually play out the "Character Story."

Each player-character has a Story above and beyond the ordinary adventures encountered during the course of the campaign. This Character Story usually involves the resolution of the most important desires of the character.

Among the Strike Force characters you'll be reading about, these were a couple of the Character Stories encountered during the run of the campaign.

Phosphene — Discovery of and Acceptance by Family. Raised by a single parent and knowing of no other relatives, Phos started his career cynical and alone. Learning that he had a family, the enigmatic Blood, he discovered that he had a tremendous need to become one of them. Eventually, he met all his surviving relatives and earned the affection of most of them. Now married and a family man himself, his personal story is resolved.

Lorelei — Growth Into Womanhood. In the course of her years of playing, Lorelei grew from a 15-year-old innocent into a mature woman and team leader; the most important elements of this transition (other than the years involved) were her romance with Commodore and her eventual rescue of and reunion with her father.

Take a look at your own character — or at all the PCs, if you're the GM — and try to root out the Character Story of each one. Sometimes it'll be easy. If a big, nasty Hunted figures into the character's background — including the development of his powers and the stimuli which made the character decide to be a hero — then the final defeat of the

Hunted is likely to be the Character Story. Alternatively, bringing about the circumstances which will allow a hero to buy down or buy off his greatest psychological limitation (such as Luster's desperate need for acceptance and recognition by her father Overlord) could be the character's Story.

In short, try to figure out what element of the character's background, relations, or psychology make him interesting but will eventually make him (and his player) frustrated and unhappy if not ultimately resolved. That's the Character Story. Once you've figured out what it is, over the months and years, through subplots and adventures, you should bring this Story to a climax and resolution.

Don't be fooled into thinking that the resolution of a character's main Story will result in the character getting bored and retiring from the campaign. In all likelihood, by now he's become firmly entrenched in the superhero world and will continue adventuring, probably as a much saner person. Completion of a character's story can, however, allow a player to retire his hero gracefully before he grows weary of playing him. The decision to start a new PC can breathe new life into a campaign, keeping things fresh and exciting.

Not all characters will present the GM with a Story to develop. Some never do. Occasionally, the GM has to invent the Story tailored to the character. This, too, is fine. Of course, no campaign lasts long enough for every Character Story to be discovered and exploited; the GM who cannot figure out one character's story can always move on to another character.

SIMULATING THE COMICS

Often, the GM will find that his players are doing things that just don't resemble the comics in some way that's important to him. Just as often, the GM will address the problem by telling the players, "Hey, let's do it this way ..." or by slapping the characters with diminished Experience. These methods don't usually work.

The most efficient method I've found of instituting change is by directly confronting the characters with the results of their errant behavior. For instance, if they fail to develop team tactics, they get beaten by teams who employ such tactics. If they are needlessly violent, they get to see first-hand the results of their killing — such as the accidental murder of other players' DNPCs.

If you show off an NPC or NPC team as being superior because they do something the PCs don't, it's likely the PCs will adopt the tactics, methods, or ethics in question — so as not to be second-rate.