Character Creation

Basic Rules

These posts cover basic rules that underpin the *Phoenix* game: how to use character points to buy various elements of your character, and how ability scores work in a superhero game.

- [Character Points](#)
- [Generating Ability Scores](#)

Genre Guidelines

These posts describe how to bridge the gap between the superhero genre and RPGs. They are mostly flavour text, except for Secret Identities and Super Teams, which have hard rules.

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Character Points

Character points, or "CPs," are the base unit of the game. With them, you can purchase ability scores, advantages, and powers. There are ads that also allow you to buy [feats](#) (2cp each), [skill points](#) (1cp for 4 points), and [levels](#) (10cp each). The powers [Ability Boost](#) and [Ability Enhancement](#) allow you to raise your score into the super range.

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Character Points

Benefit	Cost
Powers	varies
Ability Scores (Power)	2cp / +1
Ads	varies
Feats (Ad)	2cp
Skill Points (Ad)	1cp / 4
Character Levels (Ad)	10cp / level

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CPs and Levels

There are two models for earning CPs: linear and curved (see below). GMs and players should decide as a group which kind of game they all want to play. In the **linear model**, you'll hang out at street-level for quite a while; in the **curved model**, you'll rapidly increase to global power levels and then godlike/cosmic levels after that. It's really just matter of what you want to play.

In both cases, you **get your CPs halfway through every level** (i.e., at 500XP; more details here). You can bank CPs as long as you want, and you can spend them when you earn them, between games, or when you level up.

You **start your characters at 4th level**, which means that you start with 4 levels worth of CPs to spend above and beyond your natural ability scores. Starting at a higher level than 1st keeps the sheer strength of your powers in balance with your class features. It's not generally fun to be able to raze a building with your heat vision but get knocked out by a thrown brick. When you start play at 4th level, you get all of the benefits of those levels, including wealth, feats, ability score increases, skill points, and other class features, etc.

Linear Progression

In this model, you get 10CPs per level. Simple as that. The number of CPs you have will always equal your level x10. This is the standard model for the game, so all NPCs have been built on it.

Curved Progression

In this model, you get a number of CPs per level **equal to 10 + twice your level** (see below). So, the *totals* stay similar at the early levels: e.g., 4th level gets 60CP instead of 40CP. But you get more powerful a lot faster: 210CPs at 10th level instead of 100CPs.

The downside to this system is that while you have that 210CPs, you're still a 10th-level character, with the HPs and BA to match, so your powers can outstrip your basic stats. You can buy powers to compensate, of course, but you could end up buying the equivalent of levels in order to keep pace. That said, you *do* have a great deal more flexibility in what you buy because you get to decide where to compensate. It's an optimizer's option as much as it is a high-powered option, and if that's what you're into, then have at it!

Level	Total
1	12
2	26
3	42
4	**60**
5	80
6	102
7	126
8	**152**
9	180

10	210
11	242
12	**276**
13	312
14	350
15	390
16	**432**
17	476
18	522
19	570
20	**620**
21	672
22	726
23	782
24	**840**
25	900
26	962
27	1026
28	**1092**
29	1160
30	1230
31	1302
32	**1376**
33	1452
34	1530
35	1610
36	**1692**
37	1776
38	1862
39	1950
40	**2040**

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Generating Ability Scores

In addition to 10CP per character level, at character creation you get 40CP to buy ability scores from the table below. These are your "natural" or "powerless" scores, the stats you had before you got powers. A natural score of 20 is the highest that you can buy at character creation, although you can raise your natural scores with the +1 you gain every 4 levels, so it is possible to start play with a natural score of 21.

If you want to, you can spend fewer than 40 points on the table below and bank the rest, but there is a strategy to this system. Natural scores are more expensive than Ability Enhancements, but it's a power, so can be affected by the metapowers. Therefore, you have a few distinct options:

- build a character with high natural scores and who cannot have those abilities stolen or suppressed
- build a character with low natural scores, but leave them with more CPs to spend on other things
- build a character with low natural scores but raise them with Ability Enhancement, and risk that those powers could be affected by one of the metapowers

The simplest option is to just grab one of the standard ability spreads below, or spend your 40 points on the table below and buy powers as a separate step, but the more complex options can produce more powerful or unusual characters.

Natural Score Costs

Ability Score	Modifier	Point Value
3	-4	+5
4	-3	+4
5	-3	+3
6	-2	+2
7	-2	+1
8	-1	-
9	-1	1
10	-	2
11	-	3
12	+1	4
13	+1	5
14	+2	6
15	+2	8
16	+3	10
17	+3	13
18	+4	16
19	+4	20
20	+5	24

Standard Ability Spreads

For your convenience, we provide four standard spreads of natural scores. If you don't want to spend a great deal of time on the table above, you can just grab one of these spreads and get on with character creation.

- **Min/Max**: 20, 18, 8, 8, 8, 8 (costs 40CP)
- **Even**: 18, 16, 14, 12, 10, 10 (costs 40CP)
- **Low**: 14, 12, 12, 10, 10, 10 (20CP left over)
- **Very Low**: 10, 10, 10, 10, 10 (28CP left over)

Rolling for Ability Scores

GMs can, of course, employ a more traditional method of ability-score generation using one of the standard die-rolling methods, but if they do so, you will not receive 40CPs at character creation to buy your scores; instead, you receive only 10CP per character level.

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Building a Hero

Character creation in *Phoenix* proceeds through a few steps:

- concept
- power theme
- ability score generation
- class
- powers

Concept

The best place to start is with an idea of what kind of character you'd like to play, and remember, it's a superhero game, so feel free to get creative. You probably won't be able to replicate the idea exactly, but it's a useful place to start because it gives you a way to focus on the options that most interest you. If you begin the game with the idea of creating an Amazon warrior, for example, you know that the [Sneak](#) is probably not for you; the [Warrior](#) or [Champion](#) might be better. Starting with a concept also prevents you from just trying to build the most powerful character that you can and instead encourages you to build the character that you'll have the most fun playing.

Power Theme

A character concept for a superhero game tends to start with a power theme (even if that theme is that the character has no powers). Your theme could be biographical; something happened to this character that made her seek out a life of superheroism. It can be organized around an animal motif (e.g., tigers), a season of the year (e.g., winter/ice), or an energy type (e.g., electricity). It can be a reflection of a historical figure, like a knight or a ninja. It can be something even more abstract, like patriotism, friendship, or fair-play. The point is to have one idea—something consistent and identifiable—that links all the character's powers together.

Ability Scores

Now that you have a concept and a theme, it's time to buy [ability scores](). These should reflect your concept and theme.

Class

With a concept and ability scores, you can focus in on a class. There are eleven standard classes and three optional classes, so you have a lot to choose from. Each class favours certain kinds of powers or ability combinations. The important part is to find a class that grants the kinds of class features that will allow you to live out the concept. Sometimes, the class concept might fit the character you have in mind, but the class features won't be right, or the concept is all wrong but the features are perfect. Remember that you're ultimately not bound to the write-up of a class; those write-ups are there to give you a place to start. You're entirely allowed, encouraged even, to take the same class features and run in another direction.

Powers

Depending on your concept, your "powers" could be actual powers, but they could also come in the form of feats or even just a whole lot of skills, and all three—skills, feats, and powers—can support each other to a great degree. Picking feats and powers is where you get to really define a character, and skills can give her those extra areas of expertise that make her truly heroic.

Ads and Comps

Although ultimately optional, ads and comps are very common parts of a *Phoenix* character. You want them to reflect your concept, much like your powers, but many of them are elements of your character's personal life, so you can also think about them as role-playing aids.

Putting It All Together

In the end, you'll probably go back and forth, tweaking this and that until it all feels right. Don't feel the need to proceed from one step to the next and lock down the previous aspect of the character. Let it float until you're done with all of it. One of the fun things about RPGs is that the character is never really "done." You'll keep building them as you go through levels.

Example: Amazon Warrior

Let's suppose that you've decided to build an Amazon warrior from classical myth. Right away, we know a lot about this character. She'll be a mêlée fighter for the most part, which means she'll favour Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution, and the best classes are probably Champion, Soldier, or Warrior, depending on her exact focus, although Martial Artist might also fit. If she's a Champion, you'll also want a high Charisma score.

This character could be non-powered, simply a highly-trained warrior-woman, in which case you could build her out of feats: all the mêlée feats you can afford, and probably some as archery feats (the Amazons were famed for their skill with a bow). Alternatively, you could pick powers that augment her mêlée abilities but aren't flashy. Super ability scores, perhaps a modest DR score, or Amazing Fighting would do the trick. You could even give her a blessed weapon of the ancient gods in the form of a Classically-themed item power (Esoteric Item, Gadget, Iconic Item, or even Power Armour). This theme leads you to certain specific kinds of abilities and powers right away, but notice that you still have a lot of flexibility within the concept.

Example: Blaster

Let us now suppose, instead, that you want to create an energy projector, a hero who takes part in fights by sitting on a rooftop a block away and blasting the bad guys. Your primary ability will probably be Dexterity for both ranged attacks and dodging. The classes that are most useful are either the ones that have the maximum base attack (Soldier, Warrior), or possibly those with sneak attacks (Sidekick, Sneak, Soldier), which can be useful for a blaster who can stay near a fight but not get dragged into mêlée. Notice that the Soldier has both qualities, so it might be the best choice, but a Sidekick who teams up with a high-Charisma hero or two can be very effective.

The best feats to take would be the ranged feats, obviously, starting with Point-Blank Shot. Pumping up your attack and damage bonus with your blast is your primary concern, so a powerful Energy Attack is a pretty good idea, although you could also build a sniper who has nigh-uncanny precision. Your secondary concern is not getting hit, though, so feats like Dodge or Spring Attack could be helpful as well as powers like Invisibility, Flight, or Amazing Dodge. The flying, invisible blaster is exactly the kind of pain in the ass you want to be to your opponents. Again, the concept leads to certain choices, but there's still a lot of room within that concept.

What Makes a Superhero

A lot of this game is deliberately left open to your interpretation. We don't, for example, have detailed descriptions of exactly what an *Energy Attack: Concussive* looks like or the fantasy-physics behind it because we'd like to leave that kind of thing up to you. Flavour, description, and storytelling are the job of the players and the GM, and it's a fun job, so we're not going to take it away from you.

The superhero genre is also wide and varied—it spans pulp, detective/crime fiction, science fiction,

modern fantasy, action/adventure, romance, comedy, and other genres—so the best way to allow you to experience that variation is by keeping our descriptions fairly, well, generic. So think about how you want your powers to appear and how you want your character to appear. It's all up to you. There are lots of different superheroes, from tuxedo'd mystics who dash through the night, to spandex-clad aliens, to cyborg battle machines, but to give you a place to start, in this section, we'll talk a little bit about the feel of superhero stories and a related genre or two.

Never forget, though, that **no matter what we say about how superheroes usually act, the whole point of an RPG is that you are in charge of your own story**. You don't have to do any of the things we describe below when you play your characters. The superhero genre is extremely flexible. If you want to forgo a costume, go ahead. If you want to be a hero without powers, there is ample precedent for it. If your origin story is that you flipped a coin after getting powers and it was heads (hero!), that's a kind of origin in and of itself. You do not have to have a secret identity if you don't want one. You can just go by your real name. Powers, mission, and persona are just guidelines for the most typical kind of superhero. You can do whatever you want. If you and your gaming group are all having fun, you are by definition playing the game "correctly."

Mission, Powers, and Identity

There are three things that most superheroes, despite their great variety, have in common: a mission (M), a set of powers (P), and a heroic identity (I). (These paragraphs are largely based on Peter Coogan's *Superhero: Secret Origin of a Genre* (Monkey Brain Books, 2006).

Mission

The mission of a superhero usually describes why he or she is driven to fight monsters, criminals, or international pseudo-military groups bent on world domination as well as why she might be compelled to defend innocent people from the random accidents of the world. It can be something as vague as an injunction from a dead family member, a desire to keep people from a tragedy you experienced, or a dedication to an ideal or cause. Your mission isn't a set of marching orders. It's the way you look at the world and your place in it. It's a lot like an Allegiance, but more heroic.

Powers

Under the rules of this game, powers are a particular kind of in-game effect, different than skills or feats, for example. They have Origins and run by set rules, but in the sense of the superhero genre, your "powers" can be a lots of things. In this sense, powers are whatever you rely on to do your superheroing. A single Super ability could be your whole suite of powers. A metric crap-tonne of useful skills could be your powers. Mastery of a particular feat tree could be your powers.

Identity

Your superhero identity is a combination of your name, costume, and origin story. The first two usually tell a very shortened version of the last. If you have animal powers, for example, you might name

yourself after that animal. Your costume could have a stylized symbol of that animal. The point is that your appearance (your name and costume) reflects where you came from, how you got your powers, and/or what you stand for.

Your origin story, which is different from a power's Origin, usually entails getting your powers, facing a personal tragedy or significant personal event that drives you to be a superhero, or some combination of the two. If you witnessed a heinous crime or were personally damaged by it, you might dedicate yourself to eliminating crime, for example.

A slightly thinner, but perfectly acceptable, origin story involves getting powers and deciding what to do with them. You might have been working in your secret laboratory and discovered a chemical that made you telepathic. You might have encountered a powerful, cosmic being who gave you powers so that you could serve it. You might be the victim of a tragic accident that resulted in being rebuilt through bionic technology. The possibilities are practically endless. After you got these powers, you then chose superheroism.

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Secret Identities

Sometimes spuriously called a "civilian" identity ("superhero" is not a military rank!), the secret identity is a big part of a lot of superhero characters. Anyone can have one of these as long as they take some basic precautions to disguise themselves while they do their superheroing. It is the in-story reason for a heroic persona; a mask and a costume keep people from telling who you are in real life.

Costumes

Changing into your costume is most often a matter of pulling off your normal clothes to reveal the colourful tights you've hidden underneath. As long as you're wearing head-to-foot clothing—pants and long sleeves, for example—you can hide your costume. An **Observe check (DC 25) can detect a costume under your clothes**. For game purposes, we tend to just hand-wave away practical concerns like how this would make you a lot warmer than just wearing your street clothes, and where you store your boots. **Pealing off your normal clothes to reveal your costume takes one round**, assuming you leave your clothes where you change. **Collecting your clothes and storing them, in a bag or case, takes another round**. If you wear short sleeves and/or have uncovered legs—shorts or short skirts/dresses—you can still wear your tights rolled up your legs and arms, but they're a little easier to detect (Observe DC 20).

You can also **take off your street clothes and change into your tights, but that takes two rounds**, plus a fourth to store you clothing, as described above. If your costume is anything more than tights—like a leather jacket or body armour—then you need to carry it in its own backpack or case. It's always one round to get out of your street clothes. **Changing into a different set of what are essentially street clothes, army pants and a leather jacket for example, is another round**. Suites of actual body armour have donning times listed in them. Collecting your clothes still takes another round.

GMs are encouraged to play up the tension of costume changes as part of an exciting encounter, but also encouraged to not let taking an extra round to put on your boots become so pivotal that whole games are decided on that basis. It's a balancing act between enforcing rules and creating satisfying storytelling.

Getting Recognised

Even with a mask, you can still potentially be recognized. Anyone who knows you knows your face, but also your build, your walk, and how you tend to stand. Covering your face helps, but there's still a chance that they can tell who you are.

Recognising you requires an opposed test, Observe vs. Disguise/Performance (player's choice). Remember, though, that only people who already know what you look like have a chance of recognizing you. If you lose your mask and a random bystander sees your face, they'll just think you're "some woman" or "some guy."

The table, below, lists the equipment bonuses that various kinds of masks and costumes provide. This bonus applies to your Disguise/ Performance roll. Domino masks cover only the eyes, while half-masks cover either the lower or upper half of your face. Full-face masks cover your whole face. A hood, hat, or other device that covers your head can obscure your hair's length and colour. Bulky clothing, like heavy leather or body armour as well as wrap-around capes and cloaks, hides your body's shape. The equipment bonuses for masks stack with those of hoods/caps as well as bulky clothing, but bonuses from masks do not stack with each other, for obvious reasons.

The same mechanic applies if someone tries to recognise your voice, except that you can use only your Perform skill. In this case, coving your mouth with cloth or even just your hand muffles its sound enough that you get a +10 to your roll.

There are lots of ways you can disguise yourself and lots of ways you can get recognized, of course. Your GM will make all in-the-moment rulings under circumstances that these few paragraphs can't cover.

Masks

Mask	Equipment Bonus
Domino	+10
Half	+15
Full-Face	+20
Hood/Cap	+10
Bulky Clothing	+10

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Super Teams

Any group of heroes (minimum three) can create a Super Team. They merely have to declare their team affiliation, including coming up with a name for the group and possibly a theme or symbol, and then fight

villains together for one complete level.

At the end of that level and at each subsequent level, the team receives 2CP per team member to spend on assets that the whole team can access. Those assets can include the following:

- **Ads and Comps**: Ally, Archive, Bad Rep, Connection, Good Rep, Grunt, Laboratory, Lair, Minion, Personal Assistant, Super Vehicle, and Nemesis
- **Powers**: Esoteric Item

In the case of Good Rep and Bad Rep, the reputation modifier applies to the whole team. In the case of Nemesis, the arch enemy's power level is determined by the total power level of the whole team.

If a super team **loses over half its members** (characters, not players) then it also loses access to its collective assets. They belonged to the team, and the team no longer exists.

To **regain access to those assets**, at least two members of the original team must form a new team. If there are only two left, they'll need at least one more member. The new team must, again, be together for one full level, at which point they regain their lost assets *and* they start earning team CP again.

Super Teams can also use **Wealth Pools** to acquire assets, but that's a separate set of rules.

Pulp Heroes

Superheroes are most familiar from American comic books, but pulp fantasy is a genre and a prose style that was popular back when comics first turned up in America and Britain. Pulp heroes lead pretty much directly to superheroes.

Pulp heroes tend to be based on science-fiction concepts that border on the magical, like star-powered time-cars, but they can also delve into dimly-understood mysticism, usually of an exoticised and distinctly Eastern variety. They don't have secret identities as often as superheroes, but going undercover can be part of their shtick. The general power level of pulp heroes is often pretty low, so if you were to run a pulp game, you might want to reduce it to 5CPs per level . A power set could be something as simple as more than two abilities over 20 or being able to jump to especially great heights. There are also examples of pulp heroes who are like unto gods, though, so don't feel hampered by that number if you want to delve into the pulps.

Pulp heroes don't usually have the kind of thematic unity that the superhero has. Their powers might not be on a theme, and they rarely wear costumes that establish the character's history, but what they lack in iconic power, they make up for with sheer, Jazz-age *style*. Pulp heroes can ride into the afterlife in a roadster. They can learn to project illusions by spending a Summer in the "mysterious Orient." In pulps, cities are dark and frightening places filled with constant danger and criminal conspiracies. In pulps, there

really are Martians and their culture is millennia old. That can be damned fun.

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Rewards (or This Ain't D&D)

Never forget that *Phoenix* **is not a fantasy battle system**. You should not expect to be rewarded with fabulous wealth and new toys at the end of the every encounter. Superhero stories just don't work that way.

Instead, you get XP and eventually Character Points to buy new powers, and of course you get to be a Big Damn Hero. If you find super Devices or you are materially rewarded in some other way, it will be unusual and ought to be the in-game result of spending CPs. Equipment, money, and "items" are just not part of the reward system in this game.

If you think about it, **superheroes generally don't act out of a desire to be rewarded**. Although exceptions exist, the vast majority are driven by their own moral code or an event that shaped their personalities, which is why we just spent a whole page talking about the genre itself and the MPI model. Try not to think of *Phoenix* as a game that's about material rewards for the characters, but instead about having fun as players.

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