



A Role-Playing Game of Conflict and Subversion  
Against Superhuman Odds in an Alternate Past

by

John Laviolette



# **SUPERHUMAN, OR INHUMAN?**

Resistance and Subversion  
in a Dark Alternate '50s

It's the '50s. Back during World War II, America tested the first nuclear bomb -- and the energy released unexpectedly transformed a small group of people into superhumans. They could fly. They were almost impossible to kill. They could cloud men's minds. And they decided to end the war, end ALL wars, forever. End crime, forever. End human suffering, forever.

And you aren't one of them.

No, you're one of the ordinary people. The people that the superhumans are helping. The ones who supposedly aren't suffering anymore. Sure, food and goods are being rationed according to need, and travel is restricted. Sure, you do the job the new regime tells you to do. But you don't suffer. Or if you do, you disappear quietly into one of the detention centers. You might wind up there if you even *think* about suffering. Or if it looks like people aren't happy because there aren't enough necessities available where they are living, some of them are moved to a relocation center, and eventually to the land of their dreams.

You hope. But regardless of what you think, the trains of the new regime run all night.

If you don't feel like playing by the rules, there's always money to be made on the black market, if you don't get caught. Or maybe you could run to one of the rumored free zones, beyond the reach of the regime.

Or you could join the resistance.

Resist the Atom! is a role-playing game of oppression, resistance, and subversion -- oppression not at the hands of evil, but at the hands of people who mean well. When a few patriotic citizens travelling through New Mexico saw a flash in the distance to the South, they had no idea that, despite being out of the danger zone of the Trinity test, despite minimal exposure to fallout, they would be transformed into nearly unstoppable superhuman beings. But they did what they felt they had to for their country: they volunteered. They helped their country end the war quickly. They also recruited others, once they discovered that they could transform others into superhumans as well, and that they could use their new-found telepathy to guarantee that they picked only the honest and virtuous.

But when the nations of the world began to argue about where to go from here, and when it looked like the world's hope, a United Nations, would not become a reality, those same patriotic citizens said, "No more." They didn't want their efforts to have been in vain.

So they took control.

They started with the occupied Axis countries, Germany, Italy, and Japan, since they were already conquered. The United States naturally objected to private citizens starting a "vigilante war", so they were forced to conquer their own nation as well. Selected individuals from other Allies were empowered to overthrow their own homelands and instill some form of peace on the world.

They haven't fully consolidated their power yet. There are regions so far outside their control. Superhumans are nearly unstoppable, but rare. Occupying large territories still requires an army and a government of some kind, to avoid micromanagement. And for some reason, not everyone is OK with the new world government. Loyalists to the old nations still exist, in hiding. Free zones, composed of people who have escaped the superstate, receive a constant trickle of refugees. The resistance movement actively works to thwart the new regime. And some people just take advantage of the chaos to further their own ends.

Where do you stand? Whose side are you on?



# HOW TO RESIST

## A Quick Look at How to Play Resist the Atom!

Before describing how to create a character in Resist the Atom!, it might help to have an overview of the game.

Players in Resist the Atom! take on the roles of characters in a divergent history version of the 1950s. The basic assumptions of the setting are:

- A small group of people who recently acquired extreme super abilities put an end to World War II and have imposed their own martial law.
- The major Axis and Allies governments no longer have real power and may not even exist, except perhaps in exile.
- Travel is tightly controlled, and resources are rationed.
- People who are considered potential sources of trouble, whether they have actively opposed the super government or merely said or did things that might lead to dissent, are placed in relocation camps.
- There are several underground groups opposing the occupation in one way or another.
- The player characters normally do not have special abilities, but since the abilities are “contagious”, it’s possible they may pick up an ability or two in play.
- The player characters are under pressure from various people to join the resistance, conform, or engage in criminal activity.

Players do not “build” characters, as in many other games. They either pick a completely average character and set their background information, or they randomly generate the character. Random generation is the only chance to begin the game with a special ability or with stats that aren’t average.

Characters do not improve in the usual way (earning experience points or gaining levels.) Instead, they change as the result of play. If you want to add a skill to your character, you have your character seek out ways to add that skill.

One player takes the role of GM, whose duty is to provide adversity for the player characters, describe anything not under the character's control, and make rulings on actions and situations. There's a little more improvisation in Resist the Atom! than in other games, but the GM can still prep some things in advance. There is NO plot, however. The GM decides what various non-player characters want, then lets the players interact with them. So, although the game is ostensibly about an underground resistance movement, the player characters do not have to join that movement, or join the occupation forces, or investigate a mystery. Instead, things happen around them, especially to their family, and the players make decisions about how they react; their reaction creates new events, which prompts reactions from NPCs who experience those events.

The basic order of play is:

- Create characters, perhaps more than one per player.
- Create names and descriptions of family members; the GM picks some of these secretly and randomly rolls their stats and information, setting the other family members to average stats.
- The GM sets up the initial situation: who wants the players to help them?
- The players respond to the request for help and any conflicting requests.
- The players decide any other goals they want to pursue, either in addition to or instead of helping one of the opposed forces involved in their lives.
- The GM decides how the players' actions affect the community and the opposed forces involved.

During play, there will be several times when the players describe their characters' actions. If the action is something the character would normally be able to do, and the player doesn't need to know detailed results, the character succeeds and the GM describes any consequences or reactions of other characters. However, when the player needs to know:

- if the action was finished before an opponent or rival, or before an event occurs; or,
- if the action was good enough to overcome an opponent's defenses; or,
- if the player wants a chance to do better than their default expertise;

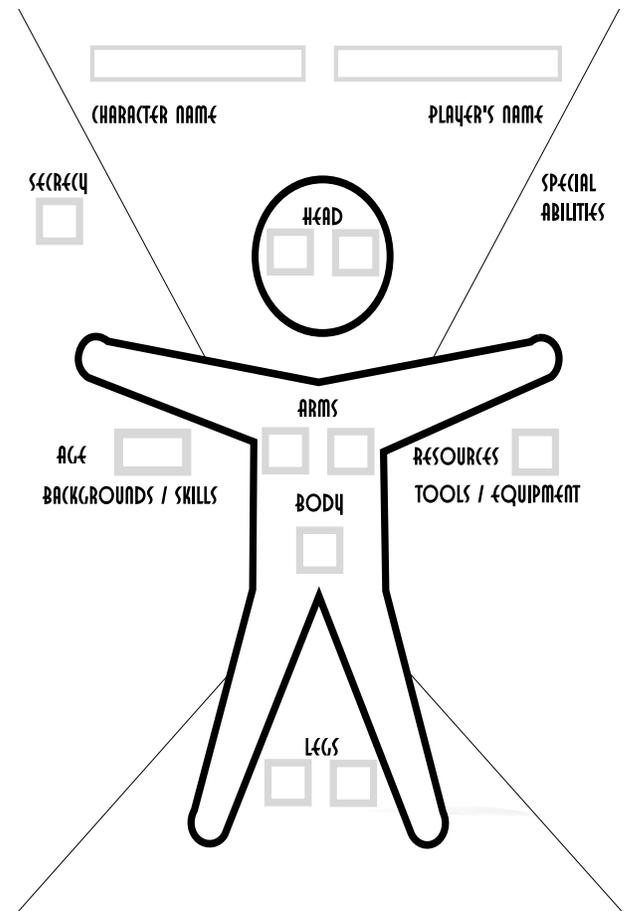
then the player has to roll 2d6 to find out what happens. The player picks one of the rolls as how well the character did, or how quickly the action was finished; if the player needs to know both, one result is speed, the other is power. Actions happen in the order of the results rolled for each action, with Speed 1 actions happening first, Speed 2 happening second, all the way to Speed 6 happening last. If the Power result is higher than the resisting force, the action has an effect. If the resisting force or defense is high, or if the player rolled a low die result, the player can take a risk to roll one die again. These rerolls do not erase what has already happened, but add to it, and may result in an unpleasant consequence.



# WHO WILL YOU BE?

## Character Description and Creation

There's more to dice rolling, speed, power, and defense, but this will be detailed later. The first step is to create some characters. Take a look at the character sheet: it has an outline of a human form and four grey lines that divide the sheet into various regions. There are boxes at the top for the character's name and player's name, and also ten boxes to write stats in. Six of the stat boxes are in pairs, with a single label for both stats in the pair. There's space for writing a short character description under the names, skills and backgrounds on the left, and important items owned on the right.



The arrangement isn't just artistic, it's practical. You can roll dice directly on the sheet to randomly determine hit location in the four basic areas: head, arms, body, and legs. You can do the same for non-human objects and interpret the body parts by analogy, or if you're stumped for ideas you can use the regions of the character sheet metaphorically. This is also the key to random character generation: you roll several dice directly on the character sheet and determine which stats to change based on where the dice land. Dice that land roughly mid-way between two or three stats affect all of them, so even rolling just one die can produce a lot of variability.

As mentioned, you have 10 numeric values (stats) to describe any given character in Resist the Atom. Seven of these are personal physical characteristics, rated from 1 to 6; three pairs of active stats and a seventh passive resistance stat. The first box in each of the three pairs is a Speed rating (lower is faster) and the second is a Power rating (higher is better.)

The Head stats cover physical sensory capabilities, awareness, and the ability to respond quickly and effectively to the environment. This covers your central nervous system and what it can do under physical stress. Head Speed is reaction time: how quickly can you react to a surprise. It also covers how long it takes to complete a mental task. Head Power is awareness, attention to detail, the ability to multitask, and keenness of senses. Note that Head Speed or Power does not cover memory or cleverness: the player provides that!

The Arms stats cover what you can do with your arms and hands: agility and conventional strength. Arms Speed is reflex speed: how quickly you can draw a gun, flip a switch, snap a picture. It also covers how quickly you can complete a manual task. Arms Power is the ability to punch, lift, pull, open, grapple, or bend; it covers most feats of strength.

The Legs stats cover what you can do with your legs and feet: movement and balance, mostly. Legs Speed is conventional movement rate as well as reaction time for dodging, jumping, or ducking out of the way of danger. Legs Power is how high or far you can jump, how hard you can kick, and how long you can carry a load.

The remaining physical stat is Body, which covers general endurance and physical resistance. Body is rarely used for any physical actions, but instead resists damage or environmental exposure (temperature extremes, holding your breath.)

An eighth stat, Age, is literally the number of years a character has been alive. It's mostly used to cover training, give a rough indication of appearance to others, and rate overall physical condition. If your character's age is over  $40 + 5 \times \text{Body}$ , your character may grow weaker with age, although there are no present aging points or lifespan limit; no one, not even the GM, knows when a character will die of old age. This is explained later in the Skills and Backgrounds section.

The remaining two stats are more abstract and nonphysical. Both are rated from 1 to 6, as for the physical stats, with higher scores being better.

Resources covers your material possessions, your credit, and social standing. When you want to buy something, convince your neighbor to do you a favor, or borrow money from a relative, you will need to make a resources roll.

Secrecy covers your immaterial worth -- your "pull", your ability to manipulate the legal system behind the scenes, your friends in high places. In other words, your secret resources. Using your Secrecy stat risks exposure of your actions, which can have social and legal repercussions.

All characters start with Speed stats of 4, Power, Body, and Resources stats of 3, and Secrecy of 1. Age is normally a minimum of 25, but it is calculated based on life experience, described later. The other nine stats can either be set to the default (good for "extras" who aren't major characters,) or they are generated randomly. You start with five six-sided dice for character generation, split between two groups of rolls:

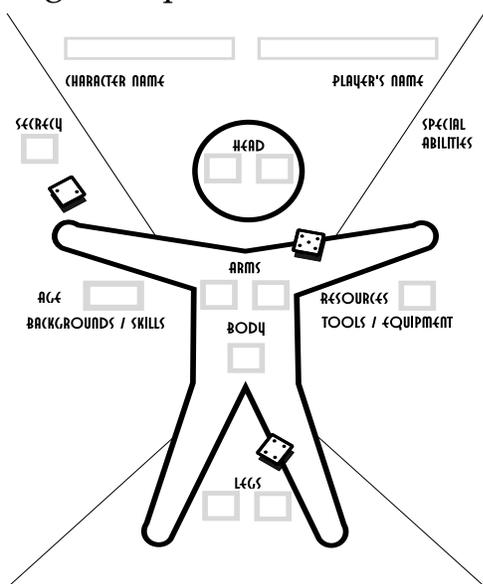
- The stats roll, to determine if a character has better or worse stats than average, or if a character has any special background or ability.
- The features roll (or rolls,) to determine special equipment, or special backgrounds or abilities if necessary.

Assign as many dice to your stats roll as you want and reserve the rest for equipment, secret resources, special background, or special ability rolls.

First, roll stat dice directly on your character sheet and look where the dice fall. Assign each die rolled to the stat or stat pair it lands closest to. If it lands near a stat pair, you can pick whether to assign it to Speed or to Power (presumably, you would assign a low roll to Speed and a high roll to Power.) If it lands near a single stat (Body, Secrecy, Resources,) assign the roll to that stat. If it lands midway between two or three regions of the character sheet, assign the roll to each stat or stat pair. You **MUST** assign each die rolled, even if that would make a stat worse.

If one or more dice lands in the area where Age and Skills/Backgrounds are recorded, the character has one or more Special Backgrounds. If one or more dice lands in the area labeled "Special Abilities", the character has one or more Special Abilities (minor powers, similar to those of the full-on supers.) If one or more dice lands near the Secrecy stat, not only can you choose the best result as your Secrecy score, but also you have one or more actual secrets. Likewise, more than one die result in the Resources area gives you a Special Resources roll. Count the number of dice in or bordering each of these special areas to get the number of dice you will need to roll for each. You can also add any of your reserved dice for these rolls. If your stats roll does not indicate any of these special results, you can only assign reserved dice to Special Resources.

Example: Suppose you split your dice into 3 dice for the stats roll and 2 dice in reserve for features. And suppose you roll your three dice and they land as in the following example:



Starting from the bottom, the die result of 4 is definitely in the Legs region, so you would assign that result to the Legs Power stat. Your character can jump a little farther and higher than normal, and might be a good choice for kicking down doors.

The 5 result is between Head and Arms. Since you probably don't want to use a 5 for Speed, both your Head Power and Arms Power stats are now 5. A bruiser, but also keen-sighted and alert.

The last die rolled is a 2 in the Secrecy area; it's clearly above the arm, so the roll doesn't affect Backgrounds. Your Secrecy goes up to 2 and you get at least one secret. Since secrets are usually liabilities, you play it safe and only roll 1 die on the sheet to determine what kind of secret you have; you roll your two reserve dice on the sheet to determine any special equipment you start the game with.

The kinds of features rolls are:

**Special Resources (Equipment):** you can have ordinary equipment appropriate for your background without much fuss, but a Special Resources roll lets you begin with special equipment: a gun (and a special permit to carry it,) travel papers, a car... Roll Special Resources dice on the character sheet and use the areas the dice land near as inspiration for the kind of equipment you have:

- **Legs:** transportation, like a car, motorcycle, or travel papers that allow you to leave your home sector.
- **Skills/Backgrounds:** a library or other information resource, or something related to a current or former job.
- **Resources:** valuable goods of some kind, or miscellaneous materials.
- **Body:** defensive equipment (body armor) or protective gear (radiation suit, gas mask)
- **Arms:** weapons, complete with permit to own them.
- **Head:** surveillance equipment, night vision goggles.
- **Secrecy:** forged documents, blackmail material.
- **Special Abilities:** fringe tech of some kind.

If you have no ideas for fringe tech items, you can roll 2d6 on the character sheet and use the high roll for the basic type of equipment, the low roll for some kind of modifier to the concept.

**Special Backgrounds:** These are unusual skills and talents that your character just "picked up" without having to actually study or train, so they don't cost Age points. Basically, these are extra rerolls beyond those you'd get from ordinary backgrounds or equipment. Roll Special Backgrounds dice on the character sheet and use the areas the dice land near as inspiration for innate talents:

- **Legs:** innate sense of balance or natural dance talent
- **Skills/Backgrounds:** photographic memory
- **Resources:** innate acting ability
- **Body:** physical hardiness
- **Arms:** unusually dextrous
- **Head:** heightened awareness or alertness
- **Secrecy:** intuition
- **Special Abilities:** danger sense or precognitive flashes

**Special Abilities:** You aren't a full-on super human, but you have some kind of special ability for one or more stats. Mark an "S" next to each stat that is special in some way. If a particular stat is already "special", but multiple dice land near it during character generation, or it is otherwise improved during play, you can upgrade "special" to "super" (marking an "SS" next to it) or add an optional unusual ability unavailable to normal humans. Special abilities always beat ordinary abilities, and super abilities always beat special abilities of the same variety. Roll Special Abilities dice on the character sheet and use the areas the dice land near to select special abilities:

- **Legs:** Unusual speed or jumping/kicking power, your choice. Optionally, you could have special balance or special dodge, or some other movement ability.
- **Age:** Special aging ability prevents normal aging; super aging ability allows you to reverse aging. Optionally, you can mark one of your backgrounds or skills as "special".
- **Resources:** Special or Super Resources represents unnatural charisma. Optionally, you can have unnatural vocal abilities.
- **Body:** Unnatural toughness, healing and damage resistance. The super version is practical invulnerability. Optionally, you could have conscious control of one normally uncontrollable organ.
- **Arms:** Unusually quick actions or physical strength, your choice. Optionally, you could have unnatural manipulative ability, like the Fonz's ability to fix mechanical devices by pounding at the right spot.
- **Head:** Unusually quick reaction time or sharp senses. Optionally, one of your existing senses extend into unhuman ranges (infrared or x-ray vision, supersonic or subsonic hearing.)

- **Secrecy:** Telepathy! You can hear surface thoughts. Optionally, you could have a talent based off your telepathy, like the ability to understand any language, locating people/objects with a sixth sense, or clairvoyance (using another person's senses to sense things remotely.)
- **Special Abilities:** You have mental projection ability -- you can send thoughts. If you have super projection, you can attempt to use any of your special physical abilities on another person, but you must touch them, enabling healing through laying on of hands, for example. Super projection is also the only way to pass on special abilities to others. Optionally, you could have a talent based on mental projection, such as illusion.

**Secrets:** These are your special connections, the strings you can pull to get things done. A secret gives you a resource you can use, but it is also a liability if someone figures out you are pulling strings, or occasionally even if someone notices your connections at all (mob ties, for example.) Roll for Secrets on the character sheet and use the areas the dice land near as inspiration for what the secret is about:

- **Legs:** A travel or transportation secret, like connections to the Underground Railroad, connections that could help you get into/out of a restricted area, or a contact in the occupation government that can give you travel permission.
- **Skills/Backgrounds:** An occupational secret -- you have contacts in law enforcement, a bureaucratic agency, or a research facility.
- **Resources:** You have access to a warehouse or manufacturing facility and can get equipment or goods you aren't supposed to be able to get.
- **Body:** You have contacts in hospitals or drug facilities.
- **Arms:** You've got muscle -- people who can do violent favors for you.
- **Head:** You literally have spies, and can gather information on people's whereabouts or plans.
- **Secrecy:** You have contacts in the resistance movement.
- **Special Abilities:** You know a super or two who's not above doing you a favor.

Rolling up a character should give you a good image of who that character is. Think up a name, if you haven't already, and summarize in two- or three-word phrases the

basic life events that explain the source of any special equipment, secrets, or special abilities. Also describe two or three distinctive things about the character's appearance or behavior, again using two- or three-word phrases. Don't overthink these; you want to leave room for the character's backstory to evolve during play. You should be ready now to describe the character's background.

You will notice that your character doesn't have an age yet. Age is tied to training and experience. Begin characters at age 15 and describe how many years of training or experience your character had in every occupation, hobby, or other activity. Six years of training is the default; characters with less experience than six years have limitations when performing actions that depend on their training, while characters with more than six years experience will be slightly better than those with six years experience. After picking all of the character's experience, writing them on the character sheet, with the year values, and add the total number of years to the base of 15 to get the character's current age.

**Ordinary Skills and Backgrounds:** If you are at a loss for ideas as to backgrounds or would just like to add some randomness, you can roll for these as well. Decide about how many job changes you would like a character to have had. Roll that many dice on the sheet and use the area each die lands in as a guideline:

- **Legs:** travel or transportation jobs
- **Skills/Backgrounds:** academic or research jobs
- **Resources:** communications, manufacturing or retail jobs
- **Body:** medical, manual labor, or athletic jobs
- **Arms:** crafts, military, or law enforcement jobs
- **Head:** jobs that require observation, transcription, or memory
- **Secrecy:** espionage or crime
- **Special Abilities:** anything ordinary that doesn't quite fit another category, like artist

The die result, plus 5, is the number of years spent in each occupation.

Aside from personal details, characters also need relationships. They cannot exist in a vacuum -- no sullen loners! You need to describe two kinds of relationships: community (in other words, relationships to the other player characters) and family. The rules for the player characters as a group are:

- Every character must know at least one of the other characters, somehow.
- Every character must have a connection, direct or indirect, to every other character in the group (your character knows Bob's character, who knows Gina's character.) No islands!

These don't have to be positive relationships or strong relationships. Maybe two characters are rivals. Maybe one is secretly envious or jealous of another. Maybe a character knows another only by reputation. But they all know one another in some way.

Family relations similarly do not need to be close or positive relationships. Every character must have at least two living relatives. Just write down the names and relationships (sibling, parent, child, spouse, lover) of each family member on a blank character sheet and then either assign them a job or roll randomly for backgrounds. Then, hand the family member character sheets to the GM, who will pick a couple of characters from all the family members for the group and secretly roll or change stats and secrets.

The final step for character prep as a group is decide where everyone is. Are they in a town? Give it a name. Are they in a relocation center, for reasons the authorities won't reveal? Decide where it is geographically. Are they in transit to a new location decided by the government? Decide where they're going and where they came from.



## **PLAYERS OF THE GAME** How to Run Conflicts in the Alternative '50s

Once the group has a general idea of what's going on and who's involved, the GM considers the descriptions of the various characters (player characters and family members) and decides what groups are interested in which individuals. The groups central to the conflict are:

**The Authorities:** This the bureacracy and the military combined. The goals of the Authorities are:

- eliminate problems (war, crime, social unrest;)
- track down potentially subversive elements;
- select seemingly upright citizens for possible recruitment;
- control EVERYTHING.

**The Resistance:** The main opposition to the Authorities. They object to the oppressive measures of the Authorities and are working against them. The goals of the Resistance are:

- recruit idealists to their cause;
- blackmail others who might be necessary to their activities;
- organize attacks on key targets to disrupt the Authorities;
- secure resources for the cause;
- overthrow the Authorities.

**The Government-in-Exile:** Almost identical to the Resistance, but not idealistic. They just want to re-establish their power, which may or may not be a good thing, depending on your viewpoint. They are less concerned about grand gestures or morality. The goals of the Government-in-Exile are:

- recruit loyalists to their cause;
- blackmail others who might be necessary to their activities;
- infiltrate key sections of the Authorities;
- secure resources for the cause;
- eliminate the super humans and punish those who assisted them.

**The Underground:** Also called the Railroad. They have established communities in remote areas to live outside of the Authorities' reach. The goals of the Underground are:

- protect their hidden communities;
- establish safe houses and travel routes;
- smuggle people to safety;
- recruit people who could assist the smuggling operation;
- escape the Authorities.

**The Black Market:** The mercenary criminal element. They can be violent, but they're more interested in profit. They specialize in rationed or prohibited items. The goals of the Black Market are:

- blackmail or bribe key individuals into assisting them;
- steal supplies and manufacture contraband items;
- eliminate threats that can't be bought;
- protect their market share;
- secure money and power.

**The Elite:** The movers and the shakers. They want power, so they're climbing the social ladders to get it, but they have no loyalty to the Authorities' cause. If the wind starts blowing a different direction, they'll switch sides. The goals of the Elite are:

- personal advancement and power;
- making allies;
- using resources to get what they need;
- doing anything it takes to keep what they've got.

**The Socialites:** The beautiful people. They have wealth or power, perhaps not as much as before the war, but enough so that life is pretty good. They aren't interested in changing anything, just in entertaining themselves. The goals of the Socialites are:

- socializing with others of their kind;
- preserving culture;
- enjoying life;
- avoiding social unrest.

**The Community:** Ordinary joes. Ask people on the street what they think about the current regime and they'd probably say it's not perfect, but if you have food on the table and your family's healthy, you should be thankful for what you've got. At least the Authorities keep the peace. The goals of the Community are:

- don't rock the boat;
- provide for your family;
- earn your keep;
- support your neighbors and be loyal to friends.

These social groups can cooperate. The Resistance and the Government-in-Exile often use the Underground to get their people out of harm's way, and all three bargain with the Black Market for supplies. The Authorities may threaten a Black Market member to cooperate in a trap for the Resistance. The Resistance may blackmail Socialites into using their house for some plan. The Elite may make under the table bargains that seem to give them an advantage. And the Community just wants to be safe and secure, whatever that takes.

And any individual non-player character is going to be allied with at least one of these groups, but potentially two or even three. People are complex. They may want to just stick to the status quo, but they've got a brother in the Resistance. Or maybe they occasionally miss the old days and wonder if the new world was all worth it.

Looking over the goals of the social groups and the descriptions of the player characters, the GM should see some possibilities for conflict jump out: things player characters can do that one or more groups need. The GM should pick two or three immediate goals for the players behind the scenes from either player characters or their family members. Does one of the player characters work for a hospital? Maybe the Resistance needs medical supplies. Is a PC's father a transportation official? The Underground may show an interest in him. Whatever goals the GM picks to set up the initial situation should be potentially in conflict; at the very least, the powers-behind-the-scenes want exclusive attention to their goals, so they are competing for the player characters' time. But they may also want something another group opposes. Or one group wants Character A to put pressure on a friend to do something for them, while another group has other plans for Character A's friend.

If a character has a secret, this implies a connection to one of the above power groups. The GM can't arbitrarily decide to threaten a character's secret, but a player's secret connections may decide to call in a favor from the PC. The player decides whether to comply or to resist.

Note that this is not a plot or a mission, in the usual RPG sense. This is a situation, a set-up to get things moving. The players should never be required to do anything, as long as they just do SOMETHING. They can reject a bribe, call the bluff of a blackmailer, refuse to help a family member being threatened. They can even betray friends and family. But whatever the players choose to do has consequences. The GM's job is just to figure out how the various non-player characters react to what the player characters do. Just keep things happening, play out what it's like to be in the middle of this conflict, and let the players decide if they are going to pick sides.



## GUTS

### The Mechanics of Resist the Atom!

You have an initial situation, and you have players responding to the situation. Eventually, you will reach a point where the players want to change something: deck the thug making veiled threats, steal a car, hide in the shadows from the cops. As mentioned before, you never roll the dice just to see if you can do something you'd normally be able to do; you only roll the dice to see if you can do something better than someone else, faster than someone else, or better than your usual expertise.

You always succeed at ordinary actions, but your actions are only effective if they overcome any defensive value or resistance value. For actions that don't require a roll, this just means comparing your power stat to an equivalent power stat for whatever you are trying to affect, if any. Most ordinary items are assumed to be Power 1. If your power is higher, your action is effective.

Example: You are trying to break up small branches for firewood. You'll succeed eventually, so why bother rolling? Just assume that the branches have the equivalent of Body 1 and start breaking them. Unless you have Arms Power 1, there's no problem.

Tools add 1 to your power, when used properly. This enables you to still take effective action against objects with high power ratings.

Example: You are trying to chop logs. The GM rates them as Body 3. If you were trying to break them apart with your bare hands, there'd be no chance in Hell you'd succeed -- you only have Arms Power 3, equal to but not greater than the defensive value of the logs. But you have an ax, which increases your effective power to 4. You can chop the logs!

If you take extra time, you add 1 to your power. The GM tells you the base amount of time it would take for someone with sufficient power, and you tell the GM how long you are willing to work. Every doubling of the base period adds 1 to your effective power. If more than one person works on the task, it adds 1 to effective power.

On the other hand, if the work at hand is double the normal amount, it adds 1 to the effective defensive value. If you try to cut time in half, it adds 1 to the effective defensive value. (Tip: compare the number of workers, the amount of work, and amount of time first, then work out the final modifier, to keep the numbers low.)

If your action is destructive in nature, then overcoming the defense rating (power) of an object damages it. Make one tally mark on a piece of scratch paper. When there are more tally marks than the object's defense rating, you've broken it, or caused some other kind of permanent change, depending on what you were trying to do. This can be used as an alternative method for determining the time for large tasks: figure out the length of one "turn" (unit of action,) and figure out how many turns it takes to cause 1 point of damage. Add 1 to the defensive value of the object and multiply this by the number of turns.

What if there's a time limit? Suppose you are chopping down a door to a house before the cops come 'round the corner. You need to finish your action before they arrive, so this is one situation where you would roll the dice.

Roll 2d6 and choose one die result as your effective power. If it is lower than your normal power, you can use your normal power in its place, but only on the first roll (the rule doesn't apply to rerolls.) Add 1 if you are using an appropriate tool. If you beat the door's defense value, you cause a point of damage. If not... you made a lot of noise, but didn't make much headway. You can either try again next turn, or risk a reroll (explained below.)

But what about that other die you rolled? Whichever die you don't pick for your power is your speed. Again, if it is not as good as your normal speed, you can use your normal speed in its place. Those cops coming around the corner? They roll 2d6 also, or perhaps just use their Legs Speed stat written on their character sheet (default of 4.) If their speed is lower than your speed, they come around the corner before you land your first ax blow.

If the cops are just a little farther away, the GM could set an effective defensive value for the distance. If the distance is set to 5, the cops won't show up until Turn 5, at which time the GM would roll 2d6 to determine whether they arrive before or after your own action that turn.

Sometimes, the effective power/defensive value of the action doesn't matter, only the time does. Suppose instead of chopping down a door with an ax, you're just trying to duck inside and close the door behind you. If the door is unlocked, that's a simple matter, and wouldn't normally require a roll. Since you're trying to do this before you are spotted, you roll 2d6 and pick the lowest result as your speed. Actions occur in order from lowest to highest, so if the cops have an average Leg Speed of 4 but you roll a 2, you're through the door before they come 'round the corner.

## Rerolls and Risks

If your effective power isn't enough, or if you are trying to finish an extended action in a single turn, you need to risk something. The most basic thing to risk is a tool or object, normally the one you are using to complete the action. What you the player do is say "I am willing to risk having this bad result happen to this possession for the chance of a reroll".

For example, go back to that door to the house you were trying to enter earlier. Let's say it's locked, and you don't have an ax, but you do have a lockpick. You use Arms 3 (Yes! Manual dexterity and physical attacks use the same stat!) and your lockpick (for a +1) and roll 2d6, but don't get a total higher than a 4. The door's lock is rated as a 5, so you weren't able to pick the lock.

"But wait!" you say to the GM. "I'm willing to risk my lockpick for a reroll."

The GM asks what exactly you are willing to risk. Do you drop your lockpick? Does it break? You and the GM have to agree that it's an appropriate risk. Whatever happens should be possible whether you succeed or not.

So let's say you and the GM agree that you are risking dropping the lockpick and having it bounce under the door. If that happens, you can get it back through a clever action (or just by busting down the door.) Whether you successfully open the

lock or not, there's still a chance you might lose the lockpick. You now get to reroll one die (not the one you are using for your speed; that stays put in case you have to compare your speed to someone else who hasn't rolled yet.)

If you roll the exact same result as your previous roll, the risk takes effect: you lose your lockpick. Whether you lose it or not, you add your reroll to your previous roll. The reroll does not erase your previous result, it adds to it. In the case of the lockpick, you try picking the lock, feel you haven't quite got the pick in right, and try twisting it around more furiously to hit the right spot.

## **Backgrounds and Skills**

Suppose you succeed (total 7) without losing your lockpick, do 1 point of damage to the lock mechanism, but want to hurry things up. You can risk a reroll on a successful roll, too. Your lockpick only gives you one reroll on a given turn. However, if you have an appropriate background (trained locksmith,) you can take another risk.

In the case of backgrounds, you can't actually risk the background itself because it's intangible (no "I risk forgetting everything I know!") You must suggest something else you're willing to risk. In this case, since you're still holding the lockpick, you could risk dropping it again (you just can't use the lockpick as the sole excuse for a reroll.)

There are a couple special features of backgrounds. If you haven't finished training (less than 6 years,) any roll higher than your years of training is treated as being no better than your actual training. You still use the actual reroll die result to compare it to your previous roll, but the number you add to your effective power is how many years of training you've had. If you worked for three years as a locksmith, you can only add a maximum of 3 to your effective power on a reroll, even if you roll a 4 or higher.

On the flip side, if you have more than the minimum of 6 years, and if you are working to pick a lock manufactured by a locksmith with only 6 years of experience, you get a +1 bonus. You never get more than a +1, but having 10 years of experience means you have a slight edge over every other locksmith with 9 years or less.

If you have more than one appropriate background, you can keep making risks to get rerolls. You would do this either to overcome an enormous obstacle, or to boost damage. If you beat the target's defense value, you do 1 point of damage. If you beat twice the target's defensive value, you do 2 points of damage. If you beat three times the target's defensive value, you do 3 points, and so on. You're just compressing several turns into one turn.

If you have an appropriate special background, you can use that for another risk as well. If you have another appropriate tool that makes sense to use, you can risk that. You can keep taking risks and making rerolls as long as the GM agrees that the risks make sense, and as long as you don't lose what you risked. Once you roll the same result as your previous roll, you lose what you risked, and the rerolls stop.

If you are risking rerolls while other people are taking actions, each reroll adds 1 to your speed. So if you roll a 2 for Speed and some other guy rolls a 3 for Speed, your action goes first, and if you reroll, your continuation of that action is simultaneous with his action. If you reroll again, your continuation of that action takes place after the other guy's action (and simultaneous with his reroll, if he risks it.) This gives the events more of a back-and-forth feel.

## **Advantages and Disadvantages**

Sometimes, you want to use a situational advantage to ... well, gain an advantage. For example, suppose you want to attack a thug. That's a straight 2d6 roll using Arms Speed and Power, trying to overcome the thug's Body stat. Suppose you ambush him from the shadows. How does that work?

First, you roll for how well you hid in the shadows, or use your default value (Head Power would probably be appropriate.) That's the value of your situational advantage. Next, you make your normal action roll to attack, while the thug makes a roll as well. You have two choices:

- Completely abandon your concealment and attack, for a flat +1, exactly like any tool;
- Try to stay in the shadows, to gain their benefit.

The second one requires a new rule, but not a complicated one. You are using “hiding in the shadows” as a defense. Tools used as defenses add layers; the opponent’s attack must defeat your “hide in shadows” value first, then defeat your ordinary defense +1. Each additional “layer” adds another +1. However, an opponent could choose to attack your defense, instead of you, causing it damage. Also, a clever, appropriate action may completely negate an advantage; if you are hiding in the shadows of the thug’s living room, the thug could spend an action to flip a light switch. No more shadows!

If you somehow remain hidden in the shadows, you can risk your advantage, just as you would a tool, to make a reroll. Some advantages will be completely negated by a risk (dropping on someone from a height, for example, adds to your attack roll, but negates your height advantage.)

Sometimes, you may wind up with a disadvantage, the opposite of an advantage. An opponent can use your disadvantage as if it were a tool or advantage, gaining a +1 on an action or taking a risk to make a reroll.

## **Special Abilities and Fringe Tech**

Fringe technology is a tool that’s beyond the cutting edge, created through the study of super abilities. If you have a fringe technology device, you take a risk any time you use it. This means that you must roll 2d6 any time you use such technology, even for an action you ordinarily would not need to roll for. If both dice match, you lose what you risk. Normally, it’s a horrible backfire result.

Special abilities also are risky. Any active use of a special ability requires a 2d6 roll and a declaration of what bad side effect may happen as a result of using such an ability. A defensive use, on the other hand, doesn’t require a roll.

One additional benefit of special abilities, as already noted, is that special abilities always beat ordinary defenses, and special defenses always beat ordinary abilities. It’s a matter of scale; if you can punch through an oak tree, that thug’s Body stat is not going to stand up to your fist. Special attacks also do +1 damage to ordinary defense. Likewise, super abilities beat special defenses, and super defenses beat special abilities.

## Resources and Secrecy

You may have noticed that Resources and Secrecy are similar. Resources covers above-board communications and negotiations, especially those based on wealth and status. Do you want to borrow your neighbor's car? Compare your Resources stat to your neighbor's Resources stat, or roll for it. The "tools" that you risk for re-rolls are mainly conversational ones, or offers of service or payment.

Secrecy, on the other hand, represent under-the-table negotiations, blackmail, or criminal contacts. Do you want to bribe the train conductor to let you travel without the appropriate official papers? Use Secrecy vs. Secrecy. But because Secrecy is under-the-table, it is always a risk. The main advantage is that, since the average Secrecy stat is 1, it doesn't take as high a roll to "damage" it and get what you want.

You do have to compare the value of what you are asking to the value of what you are offering, though, for either roll. If what you are offering is worth twice the value of what you want, you get a +1 to your roll or effective power, and another +1 for each additional doubling. If what you are offering is worth half the value of what you want, the other person gets a +1 effective defense.

## Damage, Injury and Repair

Damage has already been covered in passing, but it's important to note what damage means. It is an abstract measure of how much you have changed your target in the way you desire. If what you want is a transitory effect that causes no direct change, you often don't need to do more than 1 point of "damage". For example, hiding an object is successful if your effective skill at hiding (Head Power stat) is more than a defensive value of 0, plus any adjustments for the difficulty of hiding that particular object. This is because what you are "attacking" isn't the object you are trying to hide, but the temporary condition of "being in plain sight".

If what you are attempting is something a little more direct or lasting, you may have to beat a higher defensive value several times to cause more damage than the defensive value. Once you've done so, the effect you want takes place. The wood chopping example was one example, but an even more obvious one is when your character is

punched or shot. If you are attacked and take more damage than your Body stat, you are dying. If no one else helps you, you're dead. The attacker might decide to help you (taking you prisoner instead,) or choose to hamstring you while you are helpless, then help you, or someone may drive off the attacker and help you.

Since damage is an abstract measure, it can be repaired. If you take appropriate actions that would repair the damage, compare your appropriate stat to the amount of damage taken. If your effective power is more than the damage taken, you "damage the damage", reducing damage by one point.

However, any repair attempt is automatically a risk; you must roll for it, and matching dice results indicate an injury. An injury is a disadvantage, and so may be used as an advantage against you by opponents. Injuries can be removed, but the time required is much longer and depends on the kind of injury.

## Aging

There's an Age stat, so how does aging work?

A character between the ages of 21 and  $(40 + 5 \times \text{Body})$  is considered "normal". If a character begins the game younger than 21, that character is marked as "young", which can be used as a disadvantage by more experienced characters in situations where experience matters. The benefit of being young is that it can also be used as an advantage when recovering from sickness or injury. The risk, in such a case, is losing "young" status.

If a character is older than  $40 + 5 \times \text{Body}$ , that character must make an additional roll after recovering from sickness or injury. The risk is that the character will become "old". Being old is a disadvantage that can be used by younger characters (those not marked as "old") to get a reroll in situations where physical age matters. An "old" character must also make a recovery roll as above after sickness or injury, at the risk of becoming "very old" (which is a disadvantage exploitable by those "old" and younger,) and "very old" characters risk dying of old age.



## SUPERHUMAN

### Who Are They, and What Can They Do?

Superhumans should not appear in the game.

OK, they can appear a little bit. The people at the very top, the originals and some of the people they've fully converted, have "super" ratings in all stats, plus super projection. They would be practically impossible to harm, can telepathically sense what you are going to do before you do it, and can easily defeat ordinary human beings.

So most of the time they appear in the game, it's as color at a social event, or you spot a superhuman flying away from a military installation while you wait to attack it (they fly by jumping, then holding out a cape to slow their descent and steer.) Or if you're lucky, you have a superhuman as a contact who's willing to help you out on occasion as long as it doesn't go against his or her interests.

You might run into a "lesser super", someone with just one super ability, or perhaps a couple special abilities. You might stand a chance, especially if you were lucky enough to gain a special ability yourself. Superhumans with the "projection" special ability risk giving victims a random special ability. The "super projection" ability can be used to bestow any other ability on another human being deliberately, as long as the projecting superhuman has the ability in question; the risk is an injury to that ability. Either could explain how a player character acquired a special ability.

This is how the original superhumans built their elite army, by offering to give them Super Body and perhaps one or two other physical abilities. Elite infantry have Arms Power, elite "paratroops" have Legs Power for super jump/flight. The Telepathic Signal Corps were all given super Secrecy (telepathic ability.) This is

how the regime is maintained.

Superhumans tend to hide their abilities, except for the preceding state-sponsored positions where that ability comes with the job, so to speak. Having an ability when you aren't supposed to is a guarantee you'll be interrogated at the very least (not tortured, just telepathical scanned.) It's possible you may be sent to one of the detention centers, if you are too much of a threat in the eyes of the "powers that be".

Still, getting a special ability would help, wouldn't it?

## **Effects on Society**

The original superhumans were a little older than normal, which is why they weren't overseas fighting in the war. They weren't considered for enlistment. Acquiring powers changed that, of course, but despite their now youthful superhuman physique, their attitudes are from an older generation. This means that they exert a conservative effect on society.

Rock'n'roll exists, but not on the radio. It's something rebels and hoodlums enjoy. Commercial music is limited to swing and big band. Nothing too extreme. That's a general guideline for how to portray the alternate '50s.

Technology and urban growth have both been slowed, despite the existence of the rare fringe tech devices. City planning is controlled rationally by the superhumans, so there aren't many suburbs. They wouldn't be practical, anyways, because they depend on cars. Gasoline is rationed, travel is restricted, as is purchase of vehicles.

Clothing, shelter and food aren't too bad, despite the rationing, but many other goods are controlled; you have to show a need for the item, based on your job or other rational excuses. You can't just buy anything you feel like, except maybe on the black market. Consumer goods in general aren't manufactured in large quantities, anyways.

To summarize: think "soviet police state".



## NOTES

## Designer Comments and Acknowledgements

This game was created as part of a Tabletop Roleplaying Open forum challenge to design a game in one week, selecting five ingredients from four different categories.

I used “ten statistics” and “random character generation” as rules constraints, the “Superhero” genre, an image of a chain link fence and tower (<http://static.panoramio.com/photos/original/118083.jpg>, which made me think of a prison or concentration camp,) and the concept “Family” from the Other category. My goal was to do a superhero game that had no superheroes; there are superhuman individuals, but they aren’t heroes and will typically not be involved. Instead, everything in the game aims for a lower-powered “French Resistance”/“dystopian future” feel.

I have used the “risks” mechanic in a couple other designs. It’s sort of loosely based on the reroll mechanic in *Trollbabe* (Ron Edwards,) but works a bit differently. I changed it to meet my goal of creating more description during play.

I have previously used a dice pool technique combined with the way effective power and defensive value work in this game, but I changed this game’s actual dice roll to the much simpler “roll two dice and pick the best” mechanic. I also upped the amount of damage necessary to kill or otherwise permanently change a target.

I’ve also previously used the concept of dice maps -- rolling dice on a sheet of paper and interpreting the results based on where the dice land. My inspiration for that wasn’t a role-playing game, it was *The Design of Everyday Things* (David Norman.)

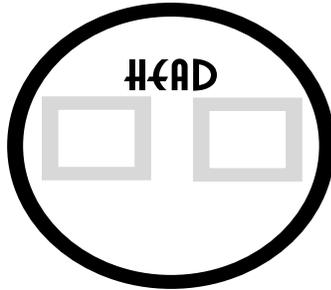
Resist the Atom! is © 2009 by John Laviolette.

CHARACTER NAME

PLAYER'S NAME

SECRET

SPECIAL ABILITIES



HEAD



ARMS

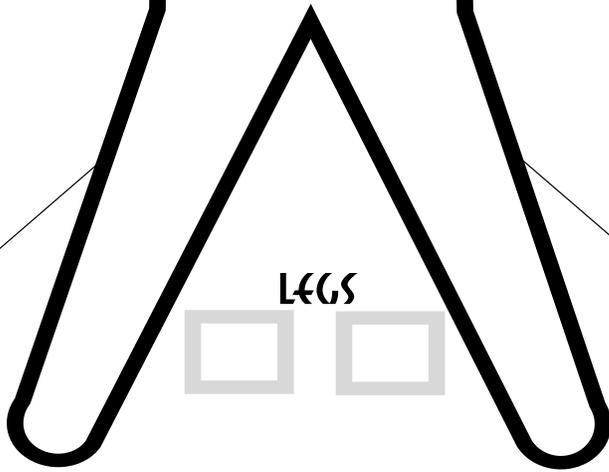
AGE

BACKGROUNDS / SKILLS

BODY

RESOURCES

TOOLS / EQUIPMENT



LEGS