

1914

Contest Entry Version

Concept, Writing and Layout

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Character Generation Playtesting

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This initial version of **1914** was written for the RPGnet Tabletop Roleplaying Open forum's "My Game-Fu Grows Stronger Yet!" game design challenge.

Ingredients Used:

- 1.) A superhero game set in the past.
- 2.) Dice are not used in the game.
- 3.) Has a reward pool that can only be spent on others.
- 4.) War and peace.
- 5.) Becoming something greater.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
The World of 1914	4
Emergence	4
The Secret	4
Ubiquity	5
Ambassadors, Exhibitions and Contests	6
Clubs and Societies	7
Supersoldiers	7
Superhuman Life	7
Character Creation	9
Step One: Concept	9
Step Two: Traits	9
Step Three: Skills	10
Step Four: Inspiration	10
Step Five: Powers	11
Sample Characters	13
Action and Decision	21
Numbers and Story	21
The Basic System: Traits	21
The Basic System: Skills	22
The Basic System: Powers	22
The Basic System: Inspiration	23
Putting It Together: Action!	24
Putting It Together: Fight!	25
Finishing Touches: Experience Points	26
Final Words	27

INTRODUCTION

1914 is a game of historical action. Drawing on pulp science fiction and superhero comics, **1914** asks the question, "How would history change with the introduction of superhumans?"

The year is 1914. In this year, one of the greatest, deadliest conflicts in human history will begin, forever changing society, technology and the tactics and strategies of warfare. It is the beginning of the end for old empires and the impetus for the accelerating development of the modern age. The days before the beginning of the Great War were fraught with tension and danger. Complex webs of alliances and treaties and simmering resentments would come together to ignite a conflagration that would claim over 20 million lives.

1914 thrusts an additional element into this heady prewar era: the appearance of individuals with astonishing abilities that seem to violate nature itself. From late 1913 on, reports have emerged across the world of men and woman capable of withstanding bullets at close range or flying without the aid of machinery. All of these strange people have the ability to encourage and propel ordinary women and men to great deeds. The entire world has become fascinated by and enamored with these superhuman beings. No one knows whence they came, but it cannot be denied that they are here to stay.

1914 is about these extraordinary people. Many of them will be superheroes, fighting for what they believe to be right. Some of them will be supervillains, using their powers and their ability to inspire ordinary people for nefarious ends. It is a game of super powers, but like you've never seen it before.

1914 is a roleplaying game. The text assumes the reader is familiar with RPGs and has played or seen them being played before. It is a diceless RPG, meaning it can be played anywhere, at any time, without the need for rolling dice.

THE WORLD OF 1914

The year 1914 is known as the year when the Great War began. The First World War shattered the ideals of earlier times and forever changed the course of history.

In **1914**, the game, that war has not happened yet. It looms ever-closer, the spectre of Death waiting to fall on the world, but there is still time to prepare. Perhaps the course of history will be changed by the strange powers of the new superhumans.

Emergence

In the second half of 1913, incredible news began filtering out of far-flung corners of the world. In the Philippines, an American Marine walked out of a firefight with his uniform full of holes, but not a mark on his body. In German East Africa, colonial officials heard tales of ghosts and spirits harrying the occupiers, supposedly summoned by tribal shamans. Soldiers on both sides of the Mexican civil war between Victoriano Huerto and Venustiano Carranza were reported not only displaying feats of incredible strength and luck, but also blasting the fear out of men with words of encouragement.

By New Year's Day of 1914, French newspapers were alight with articles and photographs of a young Parisienne taking flight without the aid of a flying machine. Not to be outdone, the British quickly produced an authentic Anglican vicar who could heal wounds with a touch and a prayer to God. The Kaiser of Germany himself, Wilhelm II, hosted a fete for a man capable of swimming beneath the sea with the power and speed of a submarine.

Soon the world had no choice but to acknowledge the existance of superhuman men and women possessing powers beyond science. The Vatican quietly went to war with itself, nearly suffering a schism over the possible religious implications. Pope Pius X reportedly refused to take a side on the issue, saying he was "waiting for a clear message from God" before making any decisions. Men and women with a bewildering array of strange abilities saved lives and took them, fought fires and destroyed buildings, brought food and shelter to the homeless and robbed banks. By March of 1914, the *New York Times* estimated two hundred different known superhumans in the United States and Europe alone. No one knew how many peasant heroes lived among the populations of Russia and China.

It is now June 1, 1914. On this day, President Woodrow Wilson will send an envoy named Edward Mandell House to meet with Kaiser Wilhelm II. They will have much to discuss: tensions in Europe, the state of overseas empires, and the arrival of the superhumans.

The Secret

Across the globe, women and men of all nationalities and backgrounds have begun to exhibit powers that baffle both the scientific and the religious. Few commonalities have been observed. Bulletproof men and flying women, healers and killers, people with the ability to apply skills at unbelievable speed with mind-

boggling depth of knowledge, the superstrong and the supergenius, all have appeared. Scientific observations of superhumans have produced no results -- except one.

Superhumans have the ability to inspire greatness in those around them. This power flows from them in all directions like a beacon of light. This Inspiration can steel the will and strengthen the arm. It cannot harm, weaken or terrify on its own. However, though it is a positive force, it can encourage villainy and mania by instilling confidence in those predisposed to do harm of various kinds.

This force, this inspiration, is the true source of superhuman abilities. This energy of dream and legend has always existed. It could be focused, to a small degree, by the brave, the kind, the noble and the terrible. By their force of personality, they could encourage others to great heights, both of heroism and of evil.

In the twentieth century, that force has been stirred by great happenings. Humanity has become more populous than ever. Technology and national pride have risen to new heights. Men take to the air and cruise under the sea. Automobiles race faster than horses. In just a few years humankind's abilities exploded, and in doing so, they focused and strengthened the invisible energy until it took root in certain individuals and began to change them.

It is possible that this process began as early as the first years of the century, but if so, those with the strange new powers kept them concealed. If this happened it is likely that the first powers were not as strong as those now being revealed. That also means that as technology continues to advance and humanity acquires ever more mastery over the world, the powers instilled by Inspiration will also continue to grow.

Because the force that gives superhumans their powers has been concentrated and strengthened by the advance of technology, powers often can be compared to the technology of the time. For example, France's Alouette can soar with the speed and grace of ever-improving airplanes. Bronza, a Russian peasant hero who can turn his body into bronze, can also punch through brick and even metal with his iron hands. Jonathon Parker of the US Marines can walk into a hail of bullets and emerge unscathed. By 1918, however, Alouette's maximum speed of 80 MPH and Bronza's mighty iron fists will be outclassed by the 180 MPH Sopwith Camel and the armor of the incredible fighting machines called tanks. Jonathon's resistance will be met with increasing rates of fire and more explosives. Alouette will be able to increase her top speed over time, but she will never break the sound barrier. Bronza can lift, push and toss great weights, but he won't ever throw a locomotive. Jonathon won't survive jumping on a grenade.

Alouette, Bronza and Jonathon are not the strongest superhumans of their age, but even the mightiest, whose appearance will rock an already shocked world, still have their limits defined by humanity's technology.

Ubiquity

Though the media of the "civilized" world focus primarily on Europe, the United States, Russia and to some degree Asia, superhumans have appeared all over the world. There are as many unknown tribal heroes as there are national

darlings and lurking villains in the more technologically advanced world.

The estimate published in the *New York Times* was low, but only because it's impossible to account for every instance of a person with powers. The population of the United States in 1914 is a little over 99.1 million. Within the 48 states, there are probably about 200 superhumans in June of 1914. That comes out, very roughly, to about one superhuman for every 495,000 to 500,000 people in the days before the Great War.

Worldwide population is estimated at around 1.8 billion people. By the previous estimate, there are between 3500 and 4000 superhumans across the globe, not all of them in the strong nations. Central and South America are civilized lands, full of people with hopes and dreams and watching a rich history unfold. The jungles, deserts and savannahs of Africa, the islands of the Pacific and the steppes and tundra of central Asia teem with tribal peoples who will celebrate the appearance of mighty heroes blessed by the spirits and gods, especially since those heroes can help them fight off the predation of imperial powers.

In the years and decades to come, these numbers will likely increase at an astonishing rate as technology advances, but this is the state of the superhuman in June of 1914.

Ambassadors, Exhibitions and Contests

After the initial shock over the appearance of superhumans, many nations quickly realized the potential in enlisting -- and sometimes drafting -- those with powers in various causes. Every nation wants its superhumans to be seen in order to gain respect. National pride has made some powerful superhumans into icons. Operating under the flags of their countries, these people have become ambassadors representing the might and glory of their homes, boosted by the prestige of their own powers.

In March of 1914, an international exhibition was held in Lausanne, Switzerland, home of the International Olympic Committee. Sponsored and organized in large part by the IOC, the exhibition brought together superhumans from all across Europe, including Russia, and the United States. Superhumans demonstrated their abilities for representatives of all the participating nations, as well as other notables such as novelist Hermann Hesse and physicist Albert Einstein.

The exhibition was intended to promote peace and understanding among nations and people in the light of these new wonders, but what really happened was quite the opposite. Every nation realized the threat it might face should superhumans be inducted into the armies of its enemies. The IOC itself immediately banned superhumans from participating in Olympic sports, in anticipation of the 1916 Games. In compensation for this decision, the IOC is considering sponsoring the development of a new competition purely for superhumans. A second international exhibition has been scheduled for late June.

Competitive superhumans have begun organizing their own competitions in cities the world over. Of late, large newspapers in London and New York have run advertisements for open challenges, with a superhuman putting up a stake, likely

at the direction of a manager, and inviting all comers to test their might against him or her. These events are attracting more public attention every day, and have come to the notice of city, state and national governments.

Clubs and Societies

Some superhumans, seeking companionship with their own kind for various reasons, have come together in prestigious societies and clubs. These groups are found in large cities like New York, London and Paris, and serve multiple functions. Many are simply social clubs where superhumans can rub elbows with like individuals, out of sight of normal people. Some serve a higher purpose, either altruistic or nefarious. Whispers speak of a superhuman Hellfire Club lurking in London with nebulous aims. Rumors abound of underground battling leagues.

So far, no international society of superhumans has emerged beyond the IOC's halfhearted consideration of a new kind of sports competition. It could be that nationality and prejudices are too strong for that kind of organization or fellowship to be founded.

Supersoldiers

Even before the March exhibition, national leaders and generals were quick to realize the potential of adding superhumans to their armies. Some already in the service developed their powers on duty, like Jonathon Parker. It was inevitable that superhumans would put on uniforms in increasing numbers.

While the powers of superhuman soldiers are important, their ability to inspire others is often even more useful. This ability will serve them well in the months and years to come. Given the sheer number of soldiers thrust into the battles of the Great War, however, even Inspiration won't be enough to singlehandedly win the day.

Given how recent the emergence of superhumans is, their numbers in the world's armies are still extremely small. There are many factors that must be considered. For example, how do you discipline an unruly superhuman soldier? If he is strong enough for you to want him as a weapon against the enemy, he is strong enough to fight you if you make him angry. Or, he may simply be able to shrug off your methods of discipline.

Superhuman Life

Superhumans have been met with awe and envy by a surprised public. While the occasional dastardly deed has screamed out from the front pages of the papers, by and large superhumans are accepted and welcomed by their communities. This means that most superhumans have no need for secret identities.

However, the press, in their drive to spice up the news to attract more attention, have taken to giving man individuals names related to their abilities. Prominent examples are Russia's Bronza, whose name simply means "bronze", and France's Alouette, the "little bird". Many superhumans who are given these names adopt the monikers. Some reject the nicknames, but there is little they can do to stop those names from filtering into the public consciousness.

Generally speaking, superhumans rapidly become celebrities, especially if they live in populous areas, and even moreso if they publically use their powers for good. While it may be possible for a person with powers to evade notice, this becomes progressively harder the more people there are and the more often the person uses those powers. For this reason, those who wish to advance their own questionable goals often surround themselves with like-minded or easily-led individuals, often while presenting a public facade.

CHARACTER CREATION

Creating your superhuman character for **1914** is a process of five steps. First, you will design the concept for your character: nationality, age, appearance, personality, history. Second, you will determine your character's base traits: how strong, how fast, how smart, how perceptive. Third, you will create your character's skills: what the character can do, has learned and been trained in. Lastly, you will develop your character's powers, the abilities that make your character more than normal.

Character Creation Steps Summary

- 1.) Concept: Detail who your character is.
- 2.) Traits: Assign 28 points to Strength, Agility, Stamina, Intellect, Will, Perception and Charm.
- 3.) Skills: Pick 10 Skills.
- 4.) Inspiration: Record 3 Inspiration points.
- 5.) Powers: Assign 20 points to Powers.

Step One: Concept

First you must decide who your character is, both physically and mentally. Your character's sex, appearance, birthplace, attitudes and history will inform many of the choices you make in the following steps.

Though history often paints the nations of the Triple Entente / Allies as the "good guys" in the Great War, it is important to note that there are good men and women in every nation. A German, Austro-Hungarian or Ottoman hero is just as likely as British, French or Russian villain. People of all kinds have discovered that they have these superhuman powers.

As well, though women suffer inequality across the globe, female characters make just as good player choices as men. Women with super powers make perfect candidates for bringing about changes in attitudes.

Step Two: Traits

Traits are your characters innate abilities. They are seven numerical values that allow you to compare your character's ability to others. These values range from one (1) to ten (10). A trait's value represents not just raw force, but ability to apply that trait.

The "average" value for a trait, the value that a typical "normal" person could be expected to have, is three (3). Values below this represent an impairment of some kind. A value of zero (0) is extremely rare, representing a complete lack; this is highly unlikely in a person. A rating of five (5) is very good. A six (6) is exemplary, and any higher rating is world class or beyond, into the realm of the superhuman.

There are seven traits. They are as follows:

Strength: The measure of a character's raw muscle power, lifting and carrying ability.

Agility: A measure of speed, agility and manual dexterity.

Stamina: This trait measures a character's health and endurance, including the ability to resist fatigue and pain.

Intellect: The measure of a character's ability to learn, understand, apply and remember information and concepts. Often called "intelligence".

Will: This trait represents the strength of a character's willpower and courage, including the ability to resist fear, coercion and despair.

Perception: A measure of the character's senses -- vision, hearing, and so on -- and his or her ability to discern information with them.

Charm: A measure of the character's force of personality, or ability to relate to and interact with other people in an attractive, appealing way; while physical appearance is some small part of this, Charm is mostly in attitude and empathy.

When creating a new character, you have 28 points to assign among these seven traits. This will allow you to have multiple traits significantly above average; in fact, you could even spread the points out to be above average in every way. You may make a trait as high as you want in this stage, but if you make any trait too high, your others will begin to suffer.

Step Three: Skills

Skills represent knowledge and training your character has learned throughout his or her lifetime. They are vast and varied; everyone has skills.

A skill in **1914** has a particular breadth. It represents ability in a particular field with multiple aspects, but not multiple disciplines. For example, a character could have a skill in History, or in Firearms. A character would not have a skill in Academics (too broad) or Model 96 Mauser (too narrow). If you want your character to have a specialty in a particular weapon or a particular area of a subject, that is for you to roleplay.

Mechanically, a skill represents a bonus that is applied to a trait whenever that skill could come into play. A History skill would apply to Intellect whenever the character is examining historical artifacts or remembering details from a particular event. Firearms skill would apply to Agility in a firefight.

Skills may apply to different traits at different times. Identifying an old weapon could apply Firearms to Intellect, for example.

Starting characters in **1914** receive ten skill picks. A the bonus given by a skill may be increased by applying more than one pick to that skill. A skill may have no more than three picks applied to it during this phase. A skill with one pick is represented simply by the skill's name. A skill with more than one pick has a number after it, two (2) or higher, to represent how many picks have been used on it. For example, "History" or "Firearms 2".

Step Four: Inspiration

Next, record three points of Inspiration on your character sheet. These are the points you can use to boost the strength and courage of others. You may have a maximum of ten points, but you start the game with three and must earn more in play.

Step Five: Powers

This final and most complex phase will design the abilities that make your character more than normal: powers. A power can be almost anything, from the ability to fly or withstand bullets to hyperability in a skill or superhuman capacity in a trait.

A power is measured by three factors in something called the F3 system: Force, Finesse and Fortitude. These are defined as follows:

Force: A rating of the power's impact and strength. It tells you just how fast you can fly, how hard your metal hands can hit, how bad of a wound you can heal, how strong your supernatural persuasion is. Force is the "oomph" of a power.

Finesse: How versatile the power is and how skillful you are in using it. This is the rating that tells you how well you can maneuver in the air, how good your metal hands are for something beyond being clubs, how deft you are at mesmerizing people without them knowing it's been done, and so on. Finesse is the "skill" of a power.

Fortitude: How long-lasting the power is, or how quickly (or slowly) it drains you to use it before you must rest. It can tell you how long you can stay aloft, how many people you can bend to your will, how long people will stay mesmerized, how much you can withstand before starting to take damage, and so forth. Fortitude is the "lasting" of a power.

All three of these factors are rated from 1 to 10, like a trait. This means a power "costs" anywhere from 3 to 30 points.

A starting character in **1914** receives 20 points to use for powers. These points may be spent however the player wishes. Each power must have at least one point in each factor, meaning a minimum of Force 1, Finesse 1 and Fortitude 1.

It is assumed that most **1914** characters will have one primary power that receives most or all of these points; because even the weakest power costs 3 points (1 each for Force, Finesse and Fortitude), splitting points among multiple powers creates diminishing returns of effectiveness. However, creativity is more important than numbers.

Presented here is a series of general benchmarks to allow players and gamemasters to decide just what a power can do at a certain level. It gives examples of resistance, flight speed, underwater speed and superstrength for Force; control for Finesse; and duration for extended-effect powers and times per

day for powers which function that way, for Fortitude. The list is only a guideline; it would be almost impossible to list every possible example. It is meant to inspire and aid the creativity of players and gamemasters in designing and adjudicating various powers.

<i>Level</i>	<i>Capacity</i>
1	Flight barely more than levitation; toughened skin; almost uncontrolled; instantaneous effects; ability to use the power for no more than a minute at a time; strength to lift and heave 350 pounds; can only use the power once before becoming exhausted
2	Resistance of bronze; ability to use the power for a couple minutes at a time; minor control; strength to lift and heave 500 pounds.
3	Healing from stabs and broken bones in minutes;
4	Flight of 35 MPH; underwater speed of 10 knots; good control; ability to use the power for an hour continually
5	Resistance of forged iron; ability to use the power continually for a couple hours at a time; healing from multiple gunshot wounds in minutes; can use the power twenty times before becoming exhausted
6	Effects lasting hours; ability to use the power continually for hours at a time; strength to lift and throw 2000 pounds; underwater speed of 17 knots
7	Flight of 80 MPH; resistance of tempered steel; graceful control; healing from major trauma in minutes;
8	Strength to lift and throw 3500 pounds; effects lasting a full day; underwater speed of 30 knots
9	Healing from the brink of death in twenty minutes; flight of 150 MPH; effects lasting multiple days; ability to continually use the power for more than a day at a time
10	Resistance of reinforced steel, flight of 200 MPH; pinpoint control; effects lasting more than a week

Special Note on Power Force and Thematics

Powers in **1914** should be thematic to the era. They are useful and amazing, but not nearly as grandiose as modern superhero comics characters. A flying woman (Force 7) can keep up with the aircraft of the time, her speed an astonishing 80 miles per hour -- but she cannot break the speed of sound or fly into space. A man of bronze with hands of iron (Force 5) can punch through wood and brick, and tear sheet metal, but he cannot use his hands to contain the explosion of a bomb. A priest can heal even egregious wounds (Force 8), but he cannot raise the dead or regenerate lost limbs.

As a general guideline, Force 10 should represent an ability that will not be duplicated by technology for decades. Force 10 Flight could reach the stratosphere, but still does not break the speed of sound -- perhaps 350 miles per hour. Force 10 superstrength could throw a heavy vehicle, but not a locomotive or, in a few years, a tank. Force 10 armor powers could withstand fire from machine guns that will later be mounted on aircraft or even survive one blast from

a ten-pounder, but could not stop a shell from a battleship. Force 10 healing could bring back someone minutes dead of a heart attack, but not someone who has been blown to pieces or been dead a full day or more.

In the decades to come, as technology improves, so may the powers of superhumans, but **1914** is concerned with the initial wave. The powers of these superhumans are incredible because they allow these people to do things people should not be able to do without technology... or even with it.

Power points may be spent to increase traits or give additional skill picks. For example, if you wish to represent "super strength" with a Strength trait of 9 instead of a power, and the Strength trait for your character was already at 6 after the traits step, you may spend 3 power points to raise that trait to 9. The 9 strength will not be as puissant as a "super strength" power, but it will always be available.

Each power point spent to gain another skill pick is the same as those chosen in the skills step. You may add a new skill, or raise a skill by one level. Skills may be raised above three picks by spending power points in this manner.

Character Advancement and Growth

People grow and change over time, from experience, accident and practice. This is represented in **1914** with experience points. These points are a form of currency that you use to increase your character's capabilities. The gamemaster awards you experience points at the end of a story. When you have enough, you can spend them to raise your character's traits, pick new skills or add picks to old ones, and increase the potency of your powers -- or even add newly discovered powers.

The necessary experience point cost for increasing or buying new traits, skills and powers is represented in the following chart.

<i>Purchase</i>	<i>Cost</i>
Increase trait rating	New rating x 5
Increase existing skill	New number of picks x 3
New skill	5
Increase power factor	New factor rating x 7
New power	Total of (Force + Finesse + Fortitude) x 3

The section entitled *Finishing Touches: Experience Points* (page XX) has more details on how the gamemaster will award you experience points for your character after a story.

Sample Characters

This section details three sample starting characters to illustrate how the creation rules can be used. These characters may be used by players to quickly jump into play, or they can be used as examples to show how the character creation rules can create many different visions.

Bronza, aka Luka Kerensky, Russian Peasant Hero

Traits

Strength 5, Agility 4, Stamina 6, Intellect 3, Will 4, Perception 3, Charm 3

Skills

Riding, Firearms, Hand-to-Hand Combat 3, Melee Weapons, Mechanic, Singing 2, Agriculture

Powers

Man of Bronze: Force 2, Finesse 2, Fortitude 5. Luka can transform his flesh into a body of bronze, capable of withstanding blows and even smaller firearms. When he transforms his body is bulky and clumsy. He can maintain this form for a few hours if need be.

Fists of Iron: Force 5, Finesse 4, Fortitude 2. Luka's hands transform into iron gauntlets of great power, capable of tearing through wood, brick and metal. He retains dexterity with these mighty metal fists, but he can only keep them transformed for a few minutes at a time.

Inspiration: 3

Background

Born 1897 in a farming community a days ride from St. Petersburg, Luka Kerensky has spent his entire life on the farm. (Except for one trip into St. Petersburg on his 16th birthday.)

As a child, his clear voice earned him praise and a place in the church choir, along with beatings from some jealous kids in the community. As he grew up, his body filled out, and his voice deepened, but still rang clear. By the time he was 13, he was the height of most adults and his tormentors learned he wasn't a target anymore. By 15 he was taller than his father, and as strong.

During his trip to St. Petersburg, he and his father heard some speeches by Bolshevik leaders, and a lot of what they said made sense to the young boy. Though he made sure to keep his thoughts to himself, since his father was a staunch Tsarist.

The following spring, as he was working the fields, a bull from a neighboring farm escaped and ran wild. The first Luka knew of it was when he heard his little sister scream. She had been bringing him water across the field and the bull began to chase her. As he ran toward her, she tripped and the bull bent its head to bury a horn in her. Luka threw himself in front of the bull, sure he was going to die, but willing to try anything to save his sister. To his surprise, it didn't hurt when the bull hit him, and he was able to easily push the bull away. When the bull rushed him, one punch sent it keeling over to the ground. When Luka looked down, he saw his skin had turned to burnished bronze, and his fingernails and hair were the color of iron...

Alouette, aka *Sophie Revel*, the *Fabulous Flying Frenchwoman*

Traits

Strength 3, Agility 5, Stamina 3, Intellect 4, Will 4, Perception 5, Charm 4

Skills

Bluff, European History, Firearms, Housekeeping, Mathematics, Navigation, Persuasion, Philosophy, Play Instrument (Violin), Riding

Inspiration: 3

Powers

Flight: Force 7, Finesse 7, Endurance 6. Sophie has the capacity to lift herself from the ground and soar about at speeds up to 80mph. She can reach heights of five thousand feet, though she must be properly prepared for the conditions at that altitude. Sophie has the agility of a graceful bird, capable of swooping and turning with ease. She can fly for hours at a time before becoming tired.

Background

All her life, Sophie Revel wanted to see what was beyond the horizon. Thanks to her birth into a wealthy Parisian family and indulgent parents, she was able to find her way around social expectations and restrictions, immersing herself in academics while at the same time learning how to manage a household.

Despite, or perhaps because of, all her learning, Sophie yearned for the freedom of the skies. One day she snuck out of the house to take a ride in a hot air balloon, to see Paris from high above. Tragedy struck; a panel on the balloon gave way catastrophically, sending the balloon plummeting. Sophie was tossed from the basket and fell to what she thought would be her death.

At the last moment, she somehow *missed* the ground and, under the power of an unknown force, zoomed upward, soaring over the roofs of the city to the amazement of the onlookers below. The balloon was lost, its pilot badly injured, but the news could only talk about the *alouette*, the little bird, who had so gloriously avoided death.

Sophie enjoys her newfound fame most of the time, though when she feels overwhelmed and in need of solitude, she has only to fly away into the sky. She might not be as fast as the best flying machines, but her speed and grace in the air are a constant delight for both her and those watching from the ground.

Gunnery Sergeant Jonathon Parker, the *Bulletproof Marine*

Traits

Strength 4, Agility 4, Stamina 4, Intellect 3, Will 5, Perception 4, Charm 4

Skills

Firearms 2, Artillery, Melee Weapons 2, Riding, Military Logistics 2, Unarmed

Combat 2

Powers

Bulletproof: Force 6, Finesse 4, Fortitude 4. Jonathon's body is capable of resisting blows, stabs, cuts and impacts from everything up to large personal rifles. This resistance can eventually be overcome by repeated attacks with high-caliber personal weapons, or overwhelmed by heavier machine guns. It does not resist blasting and burning, but can protect Jonathon from shrapnel.

Superstrength: Force 2, Finesse 2, Fortitude 2. In times of great need, Jonathon is capable of quick bursts of amazing strength. These bursts are brief, lasting no more than a few minutes at the absolute most before fading.

Background

Jonathon Parker was born in 1882 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His father worked in the steelyards and expected Jon to do the same; however, shortly after Jon's 17th birthday, the Spanish-American War broke out. In a fit of patriotic fervor, and desperate to get away from the steel mills, Jon enlisted in the United States Marine Corps.

Jon fought bravely and well in the war in the Philippine Islands, proving himself a capable and courageous soldier. Since the end of the Spanish-American War, Jonathon stayed with the Marines, serving on the Asiatic Station, especially in the Philippines. Following a battle with Moros in 1913, Jon's comrades were surprised and amazed when he emerged from the battle with multiple bullet holes in his uniform, but no wounds on his body. None of them had ever witnessed or heard of anything like it. Jon's fame slowly spread throughout the Corps, eventually filtering back to the United States in 1914 as word of other similar superhuman feats began to come from across the entire world...

Similar Ideas, Different Execution

Look at Jon Parker's powers, and compare them to Luka Kerensky's. Jon's **Bulletproof** (Force 6 / Finesse 4 / Fortitude 4) and Luka's **Man of Bronze** (2/2/5) do much the same thing, but with different flavoring and a very wide difference on the mechanical effects. First, Jon's power is much stronger, capable of deflecting much more dangerous blows. Secondly, Jon's power is more controlled, meaning deflections place his comrades at less risk. Finally, Luka can "maintain" his power longer, meaning he will have to rest less often.

Luka's **Fists of Iron** (5/4/2) resembles Jon's **Superstrength** (2/2/2) to some degree, but is much more capable and affords him more control. Like Jon's it only lasts a few minutes at the outside, but it is focused on his hands, affording more offensive and crushing capability than pushing power.

The power creation rules in **1914** are more art than science. The important thing is to work with the gamemaster to realize your vision. The system is deliberately as simple and flexible as possible to allow you the most latitude when creating your character's powers.

Fantasma, aka Ana Ramirez, the Ghostly Soldadera

Traits

Strength 4, Agility 5, Stamina 4, Intellect 3, Will 5, Perception 4, Charm 3

Skills

Firearms 2, History, Medicine, Riding, Oratory, Cooking, Stealth, Sewing, Melee Weapons

Powers

Danger Sense: Force 1, Finesse 3, Fortitude 1. Ana can receive a psychic impression of danger to herself. The danger must threaten Ana personally. This impression generally appears a few seconds before the impending threat, more if the threat is greater, up to about a minute ahead of time for the worst danger. The impression is fairly clear, though not a perfect picture of the threat.

Intangibility: Force 5, Finesse 5, Fortitude 5. Ana can turn her body insubstantial, allowing solid objects to pass through her without harming her, and vice versa. She is still visible as a translucent image. Ana must become "solid" again to manipulate objects, but she may walk across floors or solid earth in her insubstantial state. Ana may remain intangible for several hours at a time. Ana's clothing and anything she holds in her hands at the time become intangible with her, but cannot affect others until she returns to substance. Anything she drops while intangible becomes solid.

Background

As a *soldadera*, Ana fights alongside her husband in the forces of Venustiano Carranza, seeking to free Mexico from the grip of Victoriano Huerta. She has enthusiastically learned to wield both rifle and blade, and has earned a reputation as a true patriot.

For some time now, Ana has been receiving what she believes to be whispers of warning from the angels of Heaven, enabling her to avoid injury and protect those close to her. In one strange and terrifying instance, she was given a premonition of death seconds before a bullet would have gone straight through her head. Ana threw herself sideways and, instead of colliding with the trunk of a tree next to her, passed straight through it and came out on the other side. Convinced that the *soldadera* was a ghost, her enemy screamed in terror and fled.

Ana has practiced hard with her new ability, and uses it to do what she believes is both right for Mexico and her duty in the eyes of God. She would prefer not to have to kill, but if she must, she will.

Doctor Lorenzo Gallo, Superscientist

Traits

Strength 3, Agility 3, Stamina 3, Intellect 7, Will 6, Perception 7, Charm 4

Skills

Chemistry 5, Physics 5, Mathematics 5, Mechanics 5, Biology 5

Powers

Hypermind: Dr. Gallo's superhuman abilities have manifested as enhanced traits and skills. (5 points to boost traits, 15 points to extra skill picks.)

Background

A professor of physical sciences and mathematics at *Università degli Studi di Firenze* (the University of Florence), Dr. Lorenzo Gallo always did his best to bring his students the light of knowledge. Throughout his tenure at the university he consistently produced fine prodigies.

Toward the end of the last year, Dr. Gallo experienced a series of epiphanies he could neither explain nor truly understand. He seemed to be able to sense more clearly in every aspect, physically and mentally. Not only could he discard his spectacles and hear whispers at great remove -- he could also see patterns in the subjects he taught that had eluded even him before. Moreover, work that had previously been murky or obfuscated to him became as clear as the sun on a warm northern Italian afternoon.

Dr. Gallo has avidly consumed as much as he can of the latest work emerging from the great universities of Europe, and he has caught rumors of strange and incredible things coming from a man named Einstein. Though he still loves teaching, Lorenzo Gallo has begun to feel that he has a greater purpose ahead of him.

Markus Heinkel, the Human Submarine.

Traits

Strength 4, Agility 4, Stamina 5, Intellect 4, Will 4, Perception 4, Charm 3

Skills

Sailing 2, Mechanics 2, Swimming 2, Fishing, Navigation 2, Firearms

Powers

Underwater Adaptation: Force 6, Finesse 6, Fortitude 8. Markus can swim and breathe underwater for a full day at a time. He can swim at a nautical speed of 17 knots and can survive pressure at a depth down to almost 170 feet (over 50 meters).

Background

Markus has always loved boats and the sea. A native of Kiel, Markus was born the son of a sailor and had no doubt in his mind when he joined the *Kaiserliche Marine* (German Imperial Navy) at the age of 18. To his delight, he became a machinist's mate on a fabulous *unterseeboot* -- a submarine.

One night while on leave in February of 1914, Markus and several of his new

friends left a bar extremely drunk. While walking along the docks, Markus stumbled and fell into the water -- and to his surprise, even as he sank to the bottom, he found he could still breathe. He kicked off the bottom and swam out into the waters of the bay, zooming and zipping about in delight. Neither cold nor pressure affected him. When he caught up with his friends, they didn't believe his story, so the next day he demonstrated his new ability by sitting under the water for a full hour.

Markus's superior officers quickly learned of his new ability, and Markus found himself talking to ever-more-important people. Then, one day he was told that the Kaiser himself, Wilhelm II, had heard of Markus's fabulous power and wanted to meet this amazing specimen of German ability...

Reverend Peter Hartnell, the Healing Vicar

Traits

Strength 3, Agility 3, Stamina 3, Intellect 4, Will 5, Perception 4, Charm 6

Skills

Oratory 2, Local History 2, Brewing, Anglican Christianity 2, Persuasion 2, Medicine

Powers

Healing Grace: Force 9, Finesse 3, Fortitude 8. The Vicar has been gifted with the ability to heal almost any injury, right to the brink of death. This astonishingly strong power can close nearly any wound or cure almost any disease so long as the patient is still alive. It cannot reattach or regrow lost limbs, but it can ensure a complete recovery. The subject of the Vicar's ministrations can return from death's door in half an hour; lesser wounds or ills heal much more quickly.

Background

Reverend Peter Hartnell has been a fixture in his parish for a long time. He is a beloved, fatherly fellow with a kind word and solid advice for anyone who cares to listen.

Though he knows it to be God's will, the Vicar has always been troubled by death through murder, disease or unfortunate accident. He has officiated at many funerals, and often he has secretly wished that he could have done something to prevent the loss.

His chance came in early 1914 when a local boy fell off a horse at a full gallop and hit his head on a stone. The Vicar was summoned, and he came as quickly as he could assuming he would be conducting last rites to shepherd the boy's soul to God. However, when he knelt down next to the bloodied youth, Peter felt something stir deep within, as if God Himself were answering that oft-thought wish. Some kind of divine light poured through Peter and into the boy, closing the youth's wounds and bringing him back from the very edge of death.

Though Peter attributed all glory to Christ and the Father, word quickly spread of the vicar with the healing touch. Peter still does not believe that the

power is his, but he finds himself swamped by requests to use that ability to the point where he can no longer properly manage his parish. He has an interview in Canterbury to discuss his situation and this ability..

ACTION AND DECISION

Numbers and Story

Because **1914** does not use dice or other randomizers, the outcome of a given situation depends almost entirely on the gamemaster's decisions. These decisions are not made willy-nilly, however. The traits, skills and powers of the characters involved will inform the outcome of an action, sequence or plot point. Also, what the players directly state their characters are saying or doing is just as important. In short, the GM will base any outcomes on how skillful, powerful and charming the characters involved are, depending on what actions they take. The players determine what their characters are attempting, and the GM takes over from there.

For example, if characters are attempting to persuade a desperate man not to kill the child he has taken hostage, the outcome of the situation will depend on what the characters say and do, and on the traits they use. If the characters try to talk the man down, the GM will determine the man's reaction based on the characters' Charm scores, skills in persuasion, diplomacy and intimidation, and powers able to affect the man's mind, as well as what the players actually have their characters say. If, on the other hand, the characters attempt to physically restrain the man and take the child away from him, the outcome will depend on their speed and strength, any skills in grappling and fighting, and powers that will let them move faster, knock the man out or kill him, and possibly stop a bullet if the man manages to pull his trigger.

The story itself will also often be used by the GM to determine the consequences of a character's success or failure: what a character learns from an investigation, what happens if she can't open a locked door to let someone out, what happens if the conversation takes a wrong turn and someone gets offended.

At times, the dramatic requirements of a good, fun story may take precedence over the numbers on a character's sheet. Common sense is the ultimate guideline. If it is dramatically appropriate or just more fun for a character to be able to squeeze out a little extra bit of effort to save the day, despite what the numbers say, the GM should consider allowing that tiny extra, especially if the player offers a good narration that is thematically appropriate and heroic. On the flip side, if the story and fun would be better served by a character narrowly missing, even if her numbers are normally good enough, then the story takes precedence. The good of the story and the players' enjoyment is paramount.

The Basic System: Traits

The rating of a trait tells the players and the gamemaster what a character can do with that trait. The number shows how strong, agile, robust, intelligent or charismatic that character is. Traits are numbered on a scale that ranges (generally) from 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest. An "average" person's trait is given a rating of 3. This means that a character with a Strength trait of 3 can lift as much as an average adult, and so on.

Ratings below 3 represent weaknesses or impairments. A score of 2 is

noticeably less capable than average, and a 1 is a significant weakness.

On the other hand, ratings above 3 demonstrate strengths and advantages. A score of 4 is noticeably above average. A 5 is remarkable, and a 6 is the best most people will encounter. Certain truly amazing individuals possess traits with even higher ratings. Albert Einstein's Intellect would be rated at 8. The Strength of the world's greatest modern powerlifters ranges from 7 to 9.

A rating of 10 in a trait, while not impossible, would be beyond world-class. It would represent the greatest human potential. Such an individual would be said to be one in a billion, or even more. It is unlikely that even the characters of **1914** will possess a trait at 10 without it being raised by power points, making it a superhuman ability.

When you want your character to take an action, you describe what you want your character to do to the gamemaster. The GM determines what trait this action will use. Strength is used for feats of might, for example, and Will for willpower and courage. Your character's rating in that trait tells the GM how capable your character is with that trait, compared to a "normal" person. This will allow the GM to decide if your character succeeds or not, and what happens because of that.

The Basic System: Skills

Skills, unlike traits or powers, are not scored on a 1-to-10 scale. Possessing a skill at all means the character has training and ability in a particular area. For example, having the skill of "Mechanics" means that a character is capable of building, fixing, understanding and disabling mechanical devices thanks to experience and teaching. A skill pick used to acquire a skill gives a character a level of competency with that skill equal to the average professional or experienced amateur.

If you have a skill that can be used for a particular action, then you add 1 to your rating in the trait the GM says applies to that action. For example, if you have a skill in Firearms, you would add 1 to your Agility to shoot a gun at an opponent. If you have skill in Persuasion, you would add 1 to your Charm to change someone's mind.

If you have spent more than one pick on a skill, you increase that skill's effectiveness. If you used 2 picks on your Mechanics skill, you would add 2 to your Perception to understand a strange machine's workings. If you used 3 picks on History, you would add 3 to your Intellect to identify artifacts or remember particular facts.

Skills can be added to any trait, depending on the circumstances. For example, while Firearms would be added to Agility to use a gun in combat, it would be added to Perception to identify the weapon someone is holding at a distance, or to Intellect to remember the inner workings of a particular gun.

If a character does not have a skill relating to a particular action, that character can still make an attempt, but will probably fail unless he or she has a high trait rating. If a character with Intellect 4 tries to decipher the work of a physicist without having a Physics skill, for example, that character isn't likely to understand the whole thing, but she might catch a few bits she can understand.

The Basic System: Powers

Powers are special abilities that allow characters to do things others cannot. Powers bend, warp and break the known laws of physics. A given superhuman will usually have a very few powers, often only one, but those powers set these people apart from the rest of humanity.

Every power has three factors, or components, that are rated 1 to 10 like traits. A power's Force rating comes into play when the power's raw strength is important: just how fast the character can fly, how much he can lift, or how resistant he is to damage.

The Finesse rating is checked when the character's ability to apply the power properly is in question: how well the flying character can maneuver, whether the strongman can avoid crushing something as he lifts it, or if the bullets bounce off in wild ricochets.

Finally, the Fortitude rating is checked when the GM needs to determine how long a power or its effects on others lasts. This means how long the flying character can remain airborne, how often the strongman can apply his might and how long he can carry incredible weights before tiring, or how long the bulletproof hero can continue to deflect what the Force of his power shows he can before his protection begins to weaken.

Powers that grant super-versions of normal traits or skills are always more powerful than high ratings in those traits or skills, but they are subject to their Fortitude ratings. These powers are gifts of the unknown agent that grants all superhumans their abilities, whereas high traits are amplifications of normal human ability. For example, a superstrength power of Force 3 will be able to lift more than a Strength trait of 7, but only for a limited time. Powers may also be subject to nullification, should such a power or technology emerge, where traits are not hampered by that power or mechanism.

The Basic System: Inspiration

Inspiration points are the concrete measurement of your character's ability to push others beyond their limits, to heights of might and courage they couldn't normally reach. It is a mysterious force that few have even begun to understand.

Inspiration is used by a character to affect others. It is a positive force, which means it can only enhance. Inspiration cannot be used to weaken, hinder, harm or negatively affect someone in a direct manner.

When using Inspiration on normal individuals, you may spend as many points from your character's Inspiration pool as you wish. The more points you spend at once, the more you can affect people, and the more people you can affect.

For every point of Inspiration you spend at one time, the effect grows outward from you. A single point will affect someone standing next to you. At two points, the effect extends outward from you for a few feet. Four points will extend the effect out to twenty feet or so; six will reach about fifty feet. A massive Inspiration expenditure of ten points, a character's full pool, could reach the entire chamber of the US Senate.

Each point of Inspiration that you spend at one time will boost one trait by +1 for a limited time, to a maximum of +3. For example, if you spend three points of Inspiration, you may boost the Will of people within about ten feet by 3. A craven coward with a Will of 1 will suddenly have above-average courage with a Will of 4. A heroic individual with a Will of 5 will be granted an unbreakable steel-hard Will of 8. Had you spent five points, these people would still only get a boost of +3, but the effect would reach more people and would last longer. You may choose to inspire only one trait with each expenditure.

This inspiration will last for a period of time determined by how much Inspiration you spent. If you spent just one point, the effect will last about a minute at most. For two points, the time goes up to a couple minutes; for three points, about five minutes. If you spend five points, the effect would last about half an hour. For seven points it could last for multiple hours. Going for broke with ten points could make the effect last most of a day, a truly epic feat.

Once a person is affected by Inspiration from a superhuman, that person cannot benefit from any more Inspiration, for the same trait or another, until the initial Inspiration wears off. Multiple superhumans cannot stack or boost their Inspiration onto normal humans at the same time.

While it may seem attractive to release great bursts of Inspiration onto unsuspecting people, this will burn through your pool very quickly. Inspiration is regained only through your actions. When you behave in a courageous manner, performing brave deeds and acting in ways that are worthy of respect and awe, you receive Inspiration points. Generally, any time the people around the table can say, "That's cool!" about something your character has done, you earn a point of Inspiration, up to your maximum of 10 points.

Inspiration is not the same as heroism. Superhumans with selfish and evil intent can use Inspiration to embolden their own allies and underlings, making them harder to defeat. Villains can gain Inspiration by proving their strength and superiority, and basking in the awe of others. Evil superhumans are leaders who engender similar thoughts in other people. They advance ideals that place themselves first.

Inspiration can be used on other superhumans, but to a much more limited degree. A superhuman may benefit from only one Inspiration point at a time, no matter how many were spent. So even if you spent four points and a superhuman character was within the affected range, that character would only receive +1 to the trait you chose.

Putting It Together: Action!

Using the basic systems for traits, skills and powers, the GM can maintain the flow of action during a scene. Based on the interplay of the characters' actions, the players' choices and the GM's decisions on how things turn out, the story will evolve.

An action scene can be anything from a back-alley brawl to a chase, from a race against time to defuse a bomb to a cowboy-style shootout. Every move a character makes can directly affect the situation. This is especially true in a fight.

Since **1914** is a diceless game, it does not rely on a random score for

"initiative". In an action scene, the gamemaster will generally go around the table and ask the players what their characters are going to do. Then, based on the characters' traits and the complexity and length of their actions, the scene will begin to evolve. Generally, characters with higher Agility traits will move before those with lower, but distance, powers related to motion and other factors can change this. For example, punching someone is a very quick action, meaning the punching character will get to "move" again soon, but someone engaged in trying to disarm a bomb at the same time will be doing that for quite a while unless her player decides to change what the character is doing.

Because characters are not limited to numeric slots within an artificial "round", they may pause, interrupt each other and rush or extend their actions at will. The gamemaster is the ultimate arbiter of when a character's action is "complete" and the character may do something else, based on the story, the character's traits, and common sense.

Resolving action is simple. Traits are compared, depending on what the characters are doing, and the higher number generally wins. Powers tend to trump traits and skills unless the power's rating is very low and the trait or trait plus skill is high.

For example, a character trying to pull an object away from an NPC would compare his Strength trait to the NPC's. The person with the higher Strength will generally win. Two characters racing would compare Agility scores, and the one with the higher Agility will come in first. In either case, if one character has a power that can come into play, such as superstrength or lightning speed, that character can use the power to win even if his trait score is lower.

Putting It Together: Fight!

Combat is a common kind of action scene. It involves various types of actions all with the same intent: to incapacitate or eliminate the opposition. Characters can fight with their fists and bodies, with handheld weapons like knives and clubs, or with guns. Sometimes they can even use archaic weapons like swords and bows. Some superhumans can even fight with their powers.

Each type of attack is related to a certain trait. Striking and grappling are generally related to Strength, since that trait represents not just raw muscle power but also the ability to use it. Handheld weapons like knives and clubs also use Strength. Firearms and other projectile weapons use Agility, though Strength should also be considered for weapons that are thrown.

Attacks are rarely made against unresisting targets. Grappling and striking combat are usually resisted by Strength, meaning that the attacker and defender compare Strength scores. Handheld weapons are resisted either with Agility, if the target tries to dodge, or Strength if the target fights back with a similar weapon. Firearms are resisted by Agility; the target is not dodging bullets, but trying not to be in the way at all before the trigger is pulled. Thrown weapons are also resisted by Agility.

Powers can greatly change the playing field. Characters in **1914** are more than human. Superstrength powers can allow them to smash or overwhelm foes in the blink of an eye, or shrug off attacks without thinking. This is intentional.

Using powers in combat is the same as using them any other time. The consequences should make sense. Remember: powers generally win over raw traits or traits plus skills unless the power is weak and the trait is strong, or the trait plus skill total is high.

Any time characters engage in combat, there is a chance they could get hurt. Everything from fists to bullets can do damage, causing a variety of harm. Wounds are both an impairment and a warning. They range from tiny scratches, scrapes and bruises to fatal damage. Characters can weather all kinds of bumps and shocks, but they can only absorb so much lethal abuse before becoming incapacitated -- or worse, dying. Even superhuman characters are vulnerable to wounds, though their powers can protect them or allow them to heal quickly.

When a character is wounded, the gamemaster should consider how the wound will impair that character. Pain and loss of motion can affect Strength and Agility. Blood loss and the direct effect of injury can lessen Stamina. Perception can be impaired by weakness, pain, blood in the eyes and ringing in the ears.

Special Note: Major Wounds and Death

Players' characters are the focal point of **1914** and should not suffer major wounds for no reason. Major wounds should only be given in appropriate circumstances, when dramatically appropriate or when the character has done something spectacularly dumb. Fatal wounds should be even less likely, though not completely impossible. Character fatality should be a rare, striking and important thing. This does not mean characters should never die, or that a player should be able to talk the GM out of a major or fatal wound just because. Such devastating injuries should naturally follow only from proper circumstances.

Finishing Touches: Experience Points

After a story has reached its conclusion, characters receive experience points (XP) which can be used to increase their capabilities. These points are given for a variety of reasons, including success or failure, stress, education and surprises along the way.

Upon reaching the end of a story, characters are awarded XP by the gamemaster based on certain criteria. The following criteria are recommended, but the gamemaster may have individual additions or modifications to the list:

- x One point for reaching the conclusion of the story.
- x One to three points for success in achieving goals.
- x One point for failure to achieve goals, if something was learned.
- x One point for working well as part of a team.
- x One to three points for good, thematic roleplaying.

A character's XP are spent to increase traits, buy new skill picks or add more picks to existing skills, and to increase the strength of or buy new powers. They may be hoarded or spent as you wish, but they are yours alone; you may not transfer XP from one character to another.

FINAL WORDS

1914 is a living thing. This is just its birth; it will continue to grow and evolve. Over time, it is my sincere hope that it will become a thing of beauty; right now, it's an ugly duckling that represents the core of what I want it to become.

What you're reading here is the Contest version. Consider it the v0.1 if you like. Some things may change from here; much will definitely grow. This is just the bare bones of the idea.

I hope you like the ideas presented in **1914** and that it brings you good gaming.

Andrew Modro
January 4th, 2009