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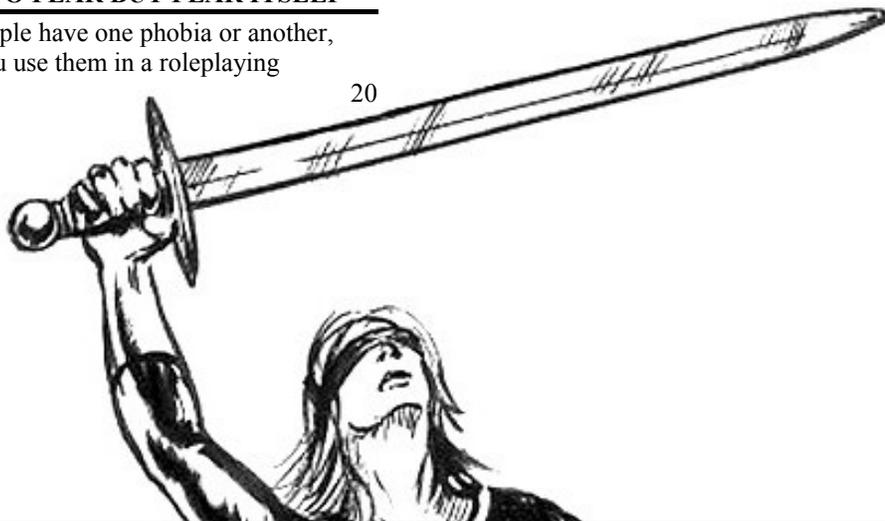
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Nothing To Fear But Fear Itself

by Ken Zieger

Phobias, irrational fears or hatreds, are common. In fact, 5.1 to 11.5 percent of the American population suffer from phobias. For *HERO System* players, phobias make excellent character Disadvantages because they provide a hint of a background and make a character more interesting. They are not genre-specific; a superhero is just as likely to have a phobia as a barbarian. Two characters with the same fear react to it differently. This article will give useful information for the Game Master and player by presenting the most common phobias, showing the most used treatment, defining phobias in *HERO System* terms, providing ideas for roleplaying fears, and finally, giving a list of phobias.

COMMON PHOBIAS

The most common phobias encountered today are acrophobia (heights), agoraphobia (open spaces), ailourophobia (cats), asterophobia (thunder), ceraunophobia (lightning), claustrophobia (enclosed spaces), cynophobia (dogs), equinophobia (horses), mysophobia (dirt, germs, contamination), nyctophobia (darkness), ophidiophobia (snakes), potamophobia (running water), pyrophobia (fire), topophobia (stage fright), and zoophobia (animals).

People can develop a phobia because of a specific incident or object that symbolizes a fear. A person locked in a closet by a parent could develop claustrophobia. To another claustrophobe, an enclosed area represents his own loneliness. Just as the cause can be different, the same phobia can have different activating circumstances, called triggers. Acrophobia might be triggered when the sufferer climbs a ladder but not when in an elevator, for example.

In a simple phobia, a person suffers from a single fear. In a complex phobia, the sufferer has two or more fears. The phobias may or may not be related in a complex phobia. Some phobias have sub-versions, which apply to specific triggers. Cremonophobia (fear of precipices) is a sub-fear of acrophobia which is only triggered when the sufferer stands near a balcony or anywhere that has a drop-off.

TREATMENT

Exposure Therapy, also called desensitization, is the systematic exposure of the sufferer to his trigger. The exposure starts at the first level that causes anxiety. The exposure time is gradually increased until the patient relaxes. The level then is increased and the process repeats. For instance, an acrophobe starts by standing on a box. The next level would be a

stepladder. The third step might use a regular ladder, and so on. Parents often use this method to dispel their children's fears.

For a severe fear or minor simple phobia, a sufferer could treat himself with a high degree of success. Stronger simple phobias, and any complex phobias, must generally be treated with the aid of a therapist.

Agoraphobia and panic sufferers often use therapist-assisted exposure coupled with drug therapy. Mild sedatives are used to keep the patient calm during exposure. Often, the patients must take prescribed sedatives for the remainder of their illness.

Another treatment, usually incorporated with one or both of the previous ones, involves family or marriage counseling. The theory behind using counseling looks at the family as a unit acting as mutual supporters for each member. However, counseling alone only relieves the stresses of the relationship, but does nothing to relieve the phobia.

Flooding, another form of desensitization, involves subjecting the sufferer to the full effects of his phobia until he reaches a comfortable state. A claustrophobe would be placed in a closet for an ever-increasing amount of time until he reaches a comfortable state. Only therapists should use the Flooding technique, because of the high possibility of making the phobia worse.

USING PHOBIAS IN YOUR GAME

The *HERO System* uses Psychological Limitations to simulate phobias. Generally, the limitation is based on the frequency of affliction and the intensity of the fear. However, most phobia sufferers unconsciously avoid the triggers of their fears. Some people, due to employment, obsessiveness, or social constraints, face their triggers often. An accountant with acrophobia would have his disadvantage as Uncommon, because he could easily avoid heights. However, an acrophobe house painter would have it as Common as his job requires ladders and scaffolds. An acrophobic construction worker could have it at Very Common.

A Moderate intensity equals a strong fear or minor simple phobia, based on the above treatments. A Strong intensity might be a severe simple phobia or a complex phobia. Total intensity indicates the sufferer might need to be on drug therapy.

The player, when deciding on a phobia, should also indicate the trigger. If there isn't a trigger, it is a generalized fear. Acrophobia without a specific trigger makes the character nervous at any type of height. For the Game Master, treat the phobia appropriately. A thief

The Nuclear Cowgirl

by Dave Mattingly

Background/History: Patrice Sellers grew up in Montana, the daughter of a cattle ranching father and a high school science teaching mother. Her brilliance was recognized early on, and her mother encouraged her to pursue her education. Her father didn't mind seeing his only child choose other than the family business, but he made sure that she at least understood the basics of riding and shooting, should she ever change her mind and decide to return to the ranch.

Patrice went into science, and eventually settled on nuclear physics, with a specialty in radiation and energy production. Everything went fine until the day of the accident at the nuclear plant. She heroically stayed in the radiation chamber, manually overriding the controls to reduce the radioactivity levels long enough for the rest of the plant to be evacuated.

She blacked out, and when she came to a few moments later, the radiation levels were back to normal. It wasn't until several days later that she realized that it was her own budding powers that absorbed the nuclear energy inside herself.

Feeling that she must use her power for good, but also feeling that her new status as a mutant might damage her credibility as a scientist should her true identity be discovered, she applied to America's leading superhero team, The Sentinels, in New York.

Personality/Motivation: Nuclear Cowgirl has a pleasant personality, and can alternate between a determinedly curious scientist, a fun-loving gun-happy country girl. She has become a superheroine since she fears that her scientific credibility would suffer if it were found out that she could alter nuclear reactions herself.

She tries to maintain an appearance of a cowgirl, to further protect her scientist identity, and tries to exaggerate her speech patterns when in costume.

Quotes: "My word! From the gamma slope of the radioactive decay, that can only mean an armed nuclear weapon has been in this room within the hour! At least one megaton, it sounds like.... Uh, I mean, yer comin' with me, pardner. Yee haw!"

Powers/Tactics: Nuclear Cowgirl has harnessed the power of the atom. She can generate and focus radiation to attack, either hand-to-hand, or at range, providing she has some means of providing range, such as throwing or shooting something that she imbues with radiation.

She can absorb radiation into her body and project it back out again. This allows her to make an area either more or less radioactive, and also increases her power should she be hit by a radioactive attack.

One of her most useful and yet exasperating secondary powers is the ability to short out radios and other small electronic gadgets.

Campaign Use: Every campaign needs a scientist, and Nuclear Cowgirl can easily fill that role. Besides her brains, she's a walking radiation accident! Somebody need to swap in a set of old powers for new? Just hang out with the Cowgirl long enough, and new mutations can be easily justified.

To increase her power level, increase her EC to 40 points, give her a second pistol and a few more levels with it, and a lot more science skills. To reduce her power level, lower her EC to 15 points, and perhaps have her powers rely on a nuclear focus.

Appearance: As Patrice, her most distinctive feature is her current lack of hair, which happened when she gained her powers and that she has been unable to regrow. So, to help disguise her identity, she wears wigs. As Patrice, she wears a very short blond wig, almost in a crewcut. As cowgirl, she wears a cowboy-style hat with curly red hair flowing from it. Apart from her changing hairstyle, Patrice is an athletic 5'7".

In her superheroic identity, she wears a white lab coat, blue jeans, and cowboy boots. Her entire appearance, however, is masked by her yellow-green force field. It blurs her appearance, giving her an eerie glow.