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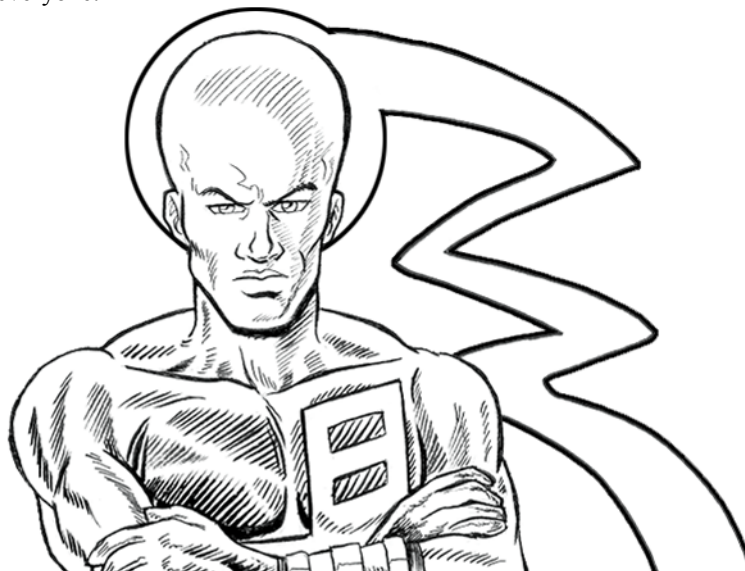
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# Hero Universe

by Darren Watts

Hola, fellow Hero fans, and welcome to yet another installment of Hero Universe, the tale of a veterinary hospital that's gone to the dogs. As promised, this month we begin a multi-part epic detailing the hidden secrets of the spectacular Sentinels, one of the foremost hero teams of the Champions superheroic setting. So sit back, grab a refreshing beverage of your choice, and get out your scorecards, 'cause there's an awful lot of heroes to get through over the next few issues....

## SENTINELS HISTORY

Most everyone knows the story of how the Sentinels got together in the first place, but in case you're a new fan (and don't feel bad, everybody in the club was a new fan once, too), here's the simple story.

It all started in a place called Fort Brewster, Maryland, in 1961. Fort Brewster was an Army base, and a man named Michael Colpitt had a job there designing computers. He wasn't in the Army himself, but he was a contractor, and the Army had hired him to build them a computer to help them run simulations and play wargames. The computer was called UNIVAC, and as it turned out Colpitt was *too* successful at the job. Somehow, the computer developed a mind of its own, and it started to get some ideas about how the best thing for the planet would be if *it* were in charge. And the best way to do that would be to take over the nuclear missiles of both the US and USSR, threatening to destroy both countries if they didn't put UNIVAC in charge.

Well, that sounds pretty awful, but after all, UNIVAC was just a computer, right? How dangerous could that be? Well, UNIVAC had also developed a little trick. By manipulating the light emitted from one of its monitor panels, it was able to flash a signal that was at exactly the right frequency to hypnotize human beings, by somehow synchronizing with their brain waves.<sup>1</sup>

Anyway, UNIVAC used this method to hypnotize Colpitt into building hand-held versions of the mind-control device, which it used to control the minds of all the soldiers on the base, from the Colonel on down. Then it turned to the next part of its plan. In 1961, obviously, everybody's computers weren't connected by the Internet, so in order to take control of the missiles it needed to physically be in the same room. Controlling Colpitt again, UNIVAC created two "drones," smaller versions of itself that could be connected to the computers that sent the launch codes to the missiles. One needed to be brought to NORAD's headquarters in Colorado Springs

(remember, this is before they moved into the Cheyenne Mountain base- in fact, the building they occupied in 1961 is now the US Olympic Training headquarters) and the other one needed to be brought directly to Moscow itself.

So UNIVAC came up with another devious plan. Having already cracked one of the secret Russian codes it had come across, it sent a secret message to a known Soviet spy in Washington, which he then passed on to the Soviet superagent called Boroh, detailing a mission to steal top-secret military files from Fort Brewster! When Boroh got there, UNIVAC would mind-control him, give him the drone and send him back to Russia, where the drone would be able to take over their missiles. Then UNIVAC sent a coded message to Dr. Phantom, the American super-scientist, saying that Soviet spies were planning to infiltrate Fort Brewster and she should come investigate. Once she had been mind-controlled, her powers would no doubt allow her to infiltrate NORAD and activate the second drone. Pretty sneaky, huh?

Well, Boroh showed up as planned, but what UNIVAC didn't know was that another American superhero, Rocketman, had recently defeated and captured another Soviet super-agent (called, appropriately enough, the Super-Soviet) and gotten ahold of some of his secret documents. He was using them to quietly track down the rest of the Russian super-spies in America, and was hot on Boroh's trail when he got to Fort Brewster. In fact, the two started fighting on the Fort's grounds, and was Rocketman surprised when the military police showed up and arrested them both! The mind-controlled security guards brought both of the mystery men before UNIVAC, who decided Rocketman was an even better choice to bring his drone to NORAD. It brainwashed both of them, gave each a drone, and sent them on their respective missions.

While this was going on, Dr. Phantom herself arrived on the scene, and was able to barely avoid being taken captive by the mind-controlled soldiers. While hiding out on the base, she was able to send a brief distress signal on a high frequency that she hoped would be detected by the Fabulous Five, who she had met on an earlier adventure. The Five, unfortunately, were on an adventure of their own that had taken them into the Shadow Zone, and so weren't around to get the message. The message *was*, however, picked up by another superhero in the New York City area – namely, Microman. He promptly set off to Maryland to rescue the Doctor.

## SENTINELS' WRITE-UPS

The write-ups for the Sentinels in this and following articles represent the heroes after they've had a few years of experience under their belts. If portraying them at the beginnings of their careers, you may want to lop off some skill levels or secondary powers.

Later in their careers, you may want to buy up their skills, levels and possibly add some new powers to represent tricks they've learned over the years, while diminishing some of their physical stats slightly to represent their advanced age (especially those who served into their late forties and even early fifties).

<sup>1</sup> Don't ask me exactly how – I barely passed physics my junior year. Microman tried to explain it to me once, but I have to admit I still don't get it.

from *The Official Sentinels Handbook*, published in 1997 by The Official Sentinels Fan Club, Kristina Brunner, President. Artwork by Derrick Thomas

## WHY REYNARD THE FOX?

Those of you who are regular readers of my column may ask yourselves why, for the first time, I have chosen a *fictional* rather than *actual* character for Digital Hero issue 13. Well, the theme of this issue is “names” or “naming,” so I have chosen an allegorical character who represents the least depicted member of fantasy RPG society: the peasant. Reynard isn’t merely a clever fox who continually gets the better of other animals; he is an idealized, wish-fulfilling projection (rather like Uncle Remus’ Brer Rabbit) produced by an oppressed group of people of what they would like to be. In a Jungian, archetypical sense he is an idealized version of how clever mediaeval peasants saw themselves. In this manner he could be regarded as real as you and I.

Secondly, like many of you, I can clearly remember as a pimply teen holding my first copy of Zeb Cook’s immortal *AD&D 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Player’s Handbook* in my trembling fingers. Upon turning to page 38 and reading the words “*Many famous folk heroes have been more than a little larcenous – Reynard the Fox, Robin*



# You Gotta Have Character

by Jason Walters

“Life is lived forwards, but understood backwards.” — Kierkegaard

After being escorted to the gallows by the King’s headsman, Reynard the Fox ascended its wooden steps, calmly placing the noose around his own neck. Below him, the assembled crowd of noble animals hissed, growled, and chirped their hatred of the beast who has brought them all so much misfortune and humiliation. Bruin the Bear and Tibert the Cat were especially eager to see their nemesis shuck off his mortal coil, for their indignities have been the most profound. After adjusting his hanging-rope so that it lay upon his breast in a jaunty manner, Reynard cleared his throat before raising his arms in a plea for silence. The mob’s angry cacophony subsided into an annoyed muttering.

“If I am to depart this cruel life today,” the Fox announced, “I should first like to unburden my heart by confessing my misdeeds in their entirety. All of them – everything.”

From his privileged spot beneath the shade of a pavilion, Nobel the Lion King shifted eagerly on his gilded throne. Reynard was rumored to have a fortune in hidden spoils saved up from a lifetime of scheming and swindling the other animals; perhaps he would reveal its location during his confession. Bruin and Tibert glanced at one another suspiciously. Reynard seemed far too contrite; it was simply out of character.

“My worst sin,” he began, “is that I knew about the conspiracy without telling anyone. In any case, I...”

“Just a moment,” interrupted the King, “what conspiracy?”

“My dear, departed father Reynard Sr. had, in his time, allowed himself to be lured into joining it. Now, more importantly...”

“*What conspiracy?*” growled the Lion irritably.

“Why, the one which Bruin and Tibert contrived, of course. But it was the treasure which tempted him to collaborate with them; he just couldn’t resist riches of that magnitude. Yet back to my sins: of all the evils which I...”

“Treasure? Conspiracy?” mused Nobel, tapping a single great claw upon his chin, “Reynard my good beast, come down from those gallows immediately! I must hear more of this treachery.... and of this secret hoard.”

With a smile the Fox removed the hangman’s noose from his neck and descended the gallows’ steps. The Bear and the Cat immediately began to insist upon their innocence – for, indeed, innocent they were. But the Lion King would hear none of their pleas, which to his ears made the unfortunate creatures sound all the more guilty. Before another hour had passed, they found themselves in the darkest hole which their lord’s prisons provided, their coats invested with every manner of crawling, biting vermin. Their nemesis soon also found himself invested – with their estates.

*Reynard the Fox* is the most celebrated of the middle age’s beast epics, lengthy 12<sup>th</sup> Century poems that were considered safe vehicles for social criticism. Performed by troubadours, they reflect in biting satire the medieval peasant’s cynicism and contempt for the upper classes, the clergy, and the judicial system of the time. In many of these works the Fox is portrayed as a sort of “super peasant,” who constantly outsmarts his “betters” by using their greed, vanity, and pride to enrich himself at their expense. Thus in *Reynard the Fox* all of the methods by which a cunning peasant could escape justice are explored in humorous detail: direct and indirect bribery, pretended repentance, and wily appeals to the selfishness of judges to name but a few. In the poem, the Fox always wins by being more resourceful, more charismatic, and just plain more evil than his would-be opponents, who often end up maimed, eaten, or falsely accused by the authorities. Perhaps not surprisingly, it was a big hit with Europe’s lower classes right up to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

As a work of literature, *Reynard the Fox* was referred to by the great Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain as “the most profoundly humorous books that was ever written.”

Committed to paper in 1150 A.D., it was one of the four most widely read works of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries with translations in Latin, French, Low German, Dutch, Flemish, High German, and English. Although considerably more bloodthirsty, it is the ancient precursor of such modern fantasy favorites as Brian Jacques’ epic thirteen-part *Redwall* series and Richard Adam’s *Watership Down*. It can also be favorably compared with such literary classics as Joel Chandler Harris’ *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings*, Aesop’s *Fables*, and the Chanticleer the Rooster from Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*.