

# Heroing & Hanging Out

**You are** a young woman, a recent college grad with a less-than-marketable degree who recently encountered something truly bizarre. In the course of that event you caught the eye of the world-saving troubleshooter known only as The Middleman. Impressed by your quick thinking and near-superhuman ability to remain unfazed in the midst of cosmic threat, he recruited you. Some might call you a sidekick, but what does terminology matter?

## **Player: Create a Character**

1. Choose an attitude: **Snarky, Irreverent, Blasé, Independent, Brutally Honest, Cocky, Pessimistic.**
2. Choose your major: **Communications, Fine Arts, Performing Arts, Philosophy, Phys Ed, Religious Studies.**
3. Choose your **number**, from 2 to 5. A higher number means you're better at **Heroing** (acting decisively in a crisis, kicking \*ss, that kind of thing). A lower number means you're better at **Hanging** (relating to "people," having conversations, maybe even relaxing).
4. Give your character a **sidekick-appropriate, alliterative name**. Like, say, "Wendy Watson" or "Meghan Markle".

**You have:** a variety of funky thrift-store outfits or ironic t-shirts; an oddly slinky "Middleman" uniform; a cell-phone; a Middle-Communicator that looks like a wristwatch; a car that's bound to break your heart very soon; and **at least a few friends** that matter very much to you. (Who are they? Write down their names. Also write down "The Middleman".)

**The character's living space** needs some thinking about. Definitely a roommate. Pretty sure it comes with quirky and mostly lovable neighbors; a surprisingly comfortable

set of furniture that may be from a thrift store, but the good kind of thrift store; and proximity to at least one place that sells artisanal root beer, or bespoke brooms, or whatever. Come up with one more cool thing, and then a drawback. Is it **an illegal subplot? Owned by a supposed philanthropist who may have dark secrets? Not technically built on a Superfund site or a Native American burial ground?** Again, you can do better than that. Go for it.

**Player Goal:** Get involved in all sorts of improbable situations, both of the saving-the-world type and of the wacky 20-something sitcom type. Revel in mixing geekdoms and genres with abandon.

**Character Goal:** May we suggest **Work-Life Balance**? Which is to say, sure, save the world and look good doing it, but don't disappoint your friends (any more than you were bound to already) in the process. And do you really want your friends to know what you're doing, or your sexy boss-man to wind up dating your roommate? If that doesn't work for you, whatever. You do you.

## **Player and GM: Create Headquarters**

Talk together and agree on what Middleman HQ's "front" business is. **Jolly Fats Wehawkin Employment Agency; Bye Bye Bye Pest Control; Hello Dali Surreal Dating Service; Dewey, Cheatham and Howe Tax Preparers.** Or something better than those. Because you can do better. Seriously. Your HQ comes ready equipped with a super-powerful but strangely archaic looking computer with global scanning and tracking capability and a nearly infinite database; a training room; a variety of weapons; and a number of surprising spaces. Maybe it also has a beverage dispenser that operates through sophisticated scanning of neural waves; a strangely peaceful meditation garden; a killer sound system; or something else you come up with? Then agree on a drawback. HQ definitely comes with a very grumpy android "assistant" who disapproves of your life choices, and its security system may be just a little bit too good for

your own good sometimes. But, **does the temperature fluctuate unpredictably? Is there no place to get shawarma within a 20-block radius? Is the only parking on-street, with meters? Or what?**

## **Rolling The Dice**

When you do something risky, roll **1d6** to find out how it goes. roll **+1d** if you're prepared and **+1d** if you're an expert. (The GM tells you how many dice to roll, based on your character and the situation. Remind them of your Attitude and Major if you think they apply here.)

- If you're **Hanging**, you want to **roll over** your number.
- If you're **Heroing**, you want to **roll under** your number.

Once you've rolled your dice:

- If you have **0 Successes**, things definitely get worse. The GM will tell you how.
- If you have **1 Success**, you barely manage. The GM will inflict a harm, complication, or cost.
- If you have **2 Successes**, you do it pretty darned well, thank you!
- If you have **3 successes**, it's a triumph! You do it, look great, and there's an additional benefit that the GM will detail.
- If any dice land **on your number exactly**, you are in the zone! Ask the GM a question about what's going on (they have to tell you true, or make something up that becomes true), and if you like, you can change your action and reroll all your dice.

## **A Middleman-Themed Lasers & Feelings Hack**

**by Paul Edson**

## GM: Create a Middleman Plot

A Threat...	
1. Dar Levoiathon, the Emperor of the Cruciatu Cluster	2. Extragalactic Criminals disguised as a K-Pop group
3. Amphibian Vampires from the bayous	4. A Rogue AI inhabiting "Smart Devices"
5. A Cult of Orthodontists	6. Alternate universe Middleman and his MiddleTrainee
Wants to...	
1. Destroy	2. Take Over
3. Acquire	4. Create
5. Co-opt	6. Escape
The...	
1. Local/National/Galactic government (or agency)	2. Mysterious circle of standing stones just outside town
3. Eye of Argon	4. Oil Tanker SS Guzzlebucket
5. International Philatelic Association Convention	6. Little League City Championship
Which Will...	
1. Blow up the sun	2. Cause a temporal loop
3. Unleash an invasion of demons (or aliens, whatever)	4. Start a war
5. Crash the stock market	6. Have a beneficial side effect

## GM: Create a Real Life Problem

Someone...	
1. Photogenic roommate	2. Landlord's son/daughter
3. Attractive stranger	4. Former coworker
5. Neighbor	6. Relative
Wants her to...	
1. Attend an event	2. Help with a project
3. Cover for them	4. Let them borrow her car
5. Read/listen to their new creation	6. Meet this "nice boy"

**"Helping"**: Once per "act," you can risk your relationship with one of your friends or the Middleman to help out with a roll by giving you +1d. If they're present in the scene, you get the die and if you still get 0 successes, put a checkmark next to their name. They were hurt or disappointed, or you looked like less than the talented, competent and charismatic individual you know you are deep inside. This is in addition to however else the GM says how things get worse. If they're not present in the scene, you can get the die, but put a checkmark next to their name no matter the result. You might be late for an event, you might have missed something important they were trying to tell you, you might have appeared selfish, but there will be consequences. If a friend or the Middleman ends up with two checkmarks at any point, you're going to have to do some serious damage control before things are okay again.

## GM: Run the Game

Play to find out how they respond to the problem, whether it's personal or cosmic. Announce Middleman threats by dramatic announcements or summonses (Your Middle-Watch chimes, interrupting Luke's recitation of his girlfriend's many betrayals), but personal ones by hints and misinterpretable statements and situations (Your roommate is gone when you drag yourself out of bed. Weird. She's not an early riser.). Balance the two as much as you can: stressing relationships is a valid response to any situation that requires a complication or cost. Mix and match genres and geeky subcultures to your heart's content, and invite the player in by asking questions. What Disney character is Dar Levoiathon dressed as? Steal liberally. Quote often. Encourage snappy dialogue, if the player's into it.

## GM: Playing the Middleman

You can play the title character however you want, but in the series, he's a milk-guzzling good guy whose flavor of invective tends toward the colorful but tame. ("Katherine Hepburn's eyes, Dubbie, that will set off a chain reaction!") Your goal for The Middleman: drive the MiddleTrainee into bizarre situations at the worst possible moment, but behave like a Boy Scout. Until the stuff hits the fan. Then, kick all the butt and give the moral to the story.

**Heroing and Hanging Out** is a tabletop RPG based on John Harper's Lasers & Feelings built to emulate in a very specific way the comic-book inspired Middleman TV series, a little-known gem aired for (just under) one season by ABC Family and helmed by the comic's writer and creator Javier Grillo-Marxuach.

Who is The Middleman? The Middleman is a freelance fixer of "exotic problems", which include mad scientists bent on taking over the world, hostile aliens and various supernatural threats. Those threats are insane casseroles of every pop- and nerd-culture reference that can be conceived of by the human mind, and some that may well be beyond the pale for the nominally sane. In the source material, we find a boy band comprised of alien war-criminals, a pop TV psychologist who is also a "Greatest Game"-style taker of sentient alien hunting trophies, gun-toting gangster gorillas, and trout-craving zombies<sup>1</sup>.

Heroing and Hanging Out is a game for exactly two players. One portrays The Middleman's new apprentice as she learns the ropes and with a little luck and persistence and a great deal of snark will be ready to fill the big man's shoes. The other takes the role of Game Master (GM) and navigates the immensely complex (but elegant in their simplicity) mashup plots, portrays the protagonist's allies and enemies, the world, and, of course The Middleman.

The MiddleTrainee must learn to deal with this new reality using the tools at her disposal: a nearly limitless supply of moxie, boundless curiosity, innate creativity and ability to think on her feet, and an initially tenuous relationship with The Middleman's "parent organization," O2STK (Organization Too Secret To Know). Along with her (sometimes) equally plucky friends, she navigates the shark-infested waters of young adulthood side-by-side with her growing responsibilities to, as the man says, "fight evil so you don't have to." Here's the thing, though... the game (and the show, and the comic) may seem to be about

kicking alien/demon/just plain funky a\*\*, but the crux, the real conflicts that the MiddleTrainee has to deal with? The Middleman says at one point, "Our mandate is to protect the people from threats infra-, extra- and juxta-terrestrial, not to become consumed with the mundane problems of everyday life." But how can anyone be a real hero when "the people" in the abstract become more important than the people she knows and loves? The action, and the laughs, come from the MiddleMission, but the real drama that drives the story comes from the crazy juggling act.

To quote the aforementioned Javier Grillo-Marxuach, from the DVD box set's introductory booklet: "...you may watch The Middleman and come to the conclusion that our characters live in a fantasy world: an unreal realm where friendships are sustaining and sustained, where heroism is rewarded not with tragedy and further burden, but with hope - and where evil is the result not of an unbeatable, unknowable and all-encompassing conspiracy, but of a stone-headed unwillingness to face the challenges of life with common human decency."

<sup>1</sup> Yeah, trout-craving zombies. Can you believe that sh\*t?!

### **Okay, Let's be Real. I'm Just PLaying Wendy Watson, Right?**

Well, sure. But, but, but... it's your version of Wendy Watson, aka Dub Dub, aka Dubbie, okay? As long as the name is alliterative, we don't really care what it is. And the personal quirks and strengths? That's all you... for this playtest version, it may be easiest to use NPCs from the show pretty much as they're presented, but the relationships don't have to be the same. Dub-Dub should probably have some creative outlet, and be a recovering slacker, but it's all negotiable.



<http://i95games.com>

Heroing & Hanging Out is based on John Harper's Lasers and Feelings and is a fan-made tribute to The Middleman comics created by Javier Grillo-Marxuach and Les McClaine, and the ABC Family series based on those comics. Any recognizable use of The Middleman IP comes from an excess of fannish love.

(<http://www.onesevendesign.com/laserfeelings/>)

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This is very much an Alpha version. Let's call it v0.1