

ZODIAC RING

by Ben Robbins

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a Lame Mage Production
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Ching-Ping "Dr Jurassic" Lin, Seth "Malachi" Richardson.
Rockstars—Rob "Major League" Carr, Evan "Rubble" Land,
Rob "Stone" Land, Jen "FireFly" Marino, GM Mike Frost.
Team Aegis—Scott "Guardian" Coutcher, Steven "The Artificer" Dipesa,
Dan "Crystalis" Pichette, Danielle "Laser" Schrier, GM Chris Haddad.
Special thanks to Dr. Stephen Scholz

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Finding the Ring

Any awakened Zodiac avatar can feel the presence of the Ring even over great distances. Even if the Ring is captured by the heroes any remaining Zodiac avatars will be able to track it down. Hiding it somewhere just delays matters, though of course the heroes will not know this.

After a full round make a DC 15 Notice check to sense the direction and distance to the Ring, increasing the DC by 2 for each rank on the Extended Range Table (for example DC 31 when 2,000 miles away).

The Ring remained hidden before Octavius Erasmus uncovered it through his arcane studies because there were no awakened Zodiac avatars to sense it.

Splitting the Ring

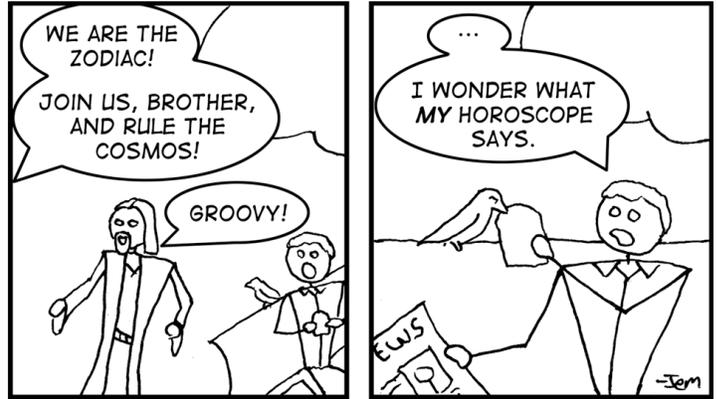
While the Ring is practically invulnerable to outside forces, it is bound to the Zodiac avatars and the cosmic Zodiac pattern just as they are bound to it. If two avatars physically try to wrest the Ring away from each other, they may turn the power of the Zodiac against itself and split the Ring into two equal parts.

Both avatars fighting for the Ring will be engulfed in the same cosmic fire that appears during awakening. The Ring remains absolutely immobile, frozen in place, until the contest is resolved. Even though the avatars may appear to be pulling on the Ring, their physical strength makes no difference—this is a contest of the psyche.

Each round, both avatars roll a Will save and compare the results. If either rolls 10 more than the other, the contest is ended and that avatar pulls the Ring away. Otherwise the contest continues and they roll again next round. If both sides rolled 20 or higher on their saves the struggle is too much and the Ring breaks, each avatar recoiling with half of the Ring in their hand.

You can also disregard these rules and simply have the Ring break if it is dramatically appropriate.

The Ring will split evenly with six signs on each half. Each half of the Ring has the powers that the whole Ring had, except each half can only locate or awaken an avatar whose sign is on that half of the Ring. This makes deciding where the break occurs very important to the plot. Consider which avatars are already in play and which remain to be awakened.



Even though each half of the Ring is functional, breaking the Ring will cause cosmic imbalance. There are no immediate visible effects, but anyone sensitive to these matters will be alarmed at the long term consequences to the celestial Zodiac pattern and the countless destinies in its care.

To fix the Ring, two Zodiac avatars must each hold one half of the Ring and then press them back together. The avatars and the Ring will be surrounded in cosmic fire, and they must concentrate to unite the Ring or the amassed energy will explode outward engulfing everyone nearby.

Both avatars make a DC 15 Will save. Success by both avatars means the Ring welds itself back together and is good as new. Failure by either results in a Blast 14 Explosion.

The Prophecy

An ancient prophecy foretells that while the Ring grants powers to the avatars of the Zodiac setting them above ordinary mortals, if all the avatars stand together “they will know no bounds.” It was this prophecy the magician Octavius Erasmus (Pisces) intended to fulfill by seeking out the Zodiac avatars and awakening them.

The exact meaning of the prophecy is open to interpretation. Erasmus believed the avatars would become god-like in their power and wisdom, taking their appointed place as the orchestrators of human destiny. Hearing this, Aries understood it to mean “lots of power” and so has continued Pisces’s quest for his own benefit.

Aquarius believes that uniting the Zodiac will herald the New Age and bring an era of peace and unity to all the cosmos. This is not so different from what Erasmus envisioned, except Aquarius sees it as a time of brotherhood of all men, not a time for the Zodiac to sit as gods above man.

The other avatars can feel the pull of the Prophecy deep within them, but their expectation of what will happen if it is fulfilled is half instinct and half what they are told. Most expect the Prophecy will give them some unfathomable power because that is exactly what they want it to give them.

Whether the prophecy has any literal meaning beyond the fact that the Zodiac would benefit from working together is up to you (see **Fulfilling the Prophecy**, page 34).

Zodiac Avatars

Personalizing Avatars

“Anne Marie?!? No... it can't be!”

“Anne Marie is no more. I am Virgo!”

The Zodiac Ring scenarios can be played out using the avatars described below, but you are encouraged to exchange some of the people who will be awakened for NPCs who are already in the game. This ups the role-playing stakes and makes the scenario much more personal. It is one thing to see a random citizen get superhuman powers, but it is another to have your fiance change into a distant and inhuman goddess before your eyes.

Even if you are playing Zodiac Ring with brand new heroes, you can quickly establish relevant NPCs before they are transformed. Ideally you would introduce the NPC in a scene as early as possible before the scene where they are awakened. This makes the NPC more real than just trotting them out to be immediately transformed by the Ring. A good trick is to introduce an NPC as a complication interfering with the hero getting to the scene (for example, hero forced to break date with fiance to rush to the crisis at City Hall). Since the NPC has no connection to the action, the players will believe the NPC was only introduced to provide an introductory obstacle, never suspecting that you are really laying the groundwork to have the NPC awakened as an avatar in a later scene.

Some potential avatars may be adversaries of the heroes instead of allies. Maybe it is a rabid reporter with a vendetta against the heroes who gets awakened, or a sleazy lawyer that has kept criminals the heroes busted out of jail. The players might be overjoyed at this opportunity to take their aggressions out against a frustrating adversary who they could not fight directly before.

At most only a few potential avatars should be known to the heroes, and probably no more than one with a close relationship. More is too improbable, even for the coincidence ripe superhero genre—it will make the heroes wonder if there is some reason why the Zodiac is centered around them.

Player Characters as Avatars

Aries's face was suffused with glee. Behind him the Crusaders lay battered and bruised, powerless to interfere as he raised the Zodiac Ring towards the drivers trapped in the gridlocked intersection. “Now let the Ring reveal the avatar of Sagittarius. Awaken! Arise and take your proper place among the Zodiac! Aries commands it!” But no cosmic light appeared among the terrified commuters, and Aries was too preoccupied to notice the glow from his fallen enemies behind him.

“I don't get it! Is this thing broken? The Ring led us here. The avatar of Sagittarius has got to be... what?!? Captain Amazing?!?”

“Sorry Aries, looks like this is not your lucky day...”

In addition to normal people, NPC heroes or villains who already have superpowers could turn out to be partially awakened Zodiac avatars. They may have believed their powers came from some other source, but it was really their Zodiac powers emerging. Their powers could be increased or tweaked to better fit the theme of

their sign as part of their awakening (see **Designing Additional Zodiac Avatars**, page 20). Like any awakened avatars they will have a brand new costume, but since they were partially awakened they will experience no major personality shift.

For a real twist make one of your PC superheroes a Zodiac avatar. Since no one knows who exactly the Ring is awakening until the process starts, the villains will be just as surprised as the heroes. This can also make the ongoing plot much more complicated—anyone trying to unite the Zodiac and fulfill the Prophecy will have to persuade the hero to join forces or destroy him. It also means a PC will be able to use the powers of the Zodiac Ring, giving the heroes a lot more options.

Whether you use the Zodiac PC option will depend a lot on your players and the kind of game they are used to. You should think carefully about whether this will be received as an interesting plot twist or as unwelcome tampering with the player's character. Different players will feel entirely differently about this kind of thing. When in doubt, take the player aside ahead of time and see whether they are receptive to the idea. If that player can keep a secret it can still come as quite a surprise to the rest of the group.

Characters with powers who turn out to be avatars can be assumed to be partially awakened and have little or no change in powers or personality, but awakening can also be a vehicle for a player to radically change an existing PC hero. A character with no real powers of their own (that obsessed avenger of the night, the battle armor guy, or the trick-shot archer) may suddenly gain powers and go through a disorienting personality change as well.

See **Changing Avatars Back to Normal** (page 20) if you want to revert a character. If a PC hero's powers and personality did not change, it does not really matter if they “change back” to normal form—even if a character is an avatar of the Zodiac, there is no reason he cannot ignore his cosmic relevance and go back to wearing his old costume and using his old name.

Zodiac NPCs

The twelve Zodiac avatars that appear in **Zodiac Rising** and **War of the Zodiac** are described. If avatars are eliminated, new avatars can be awakened in their place, letting you create avatars of your own. Ideas for future avatars are also included on each character sheet. Each is given a simple title to highlight the concept (e.g. the Judge) but in practice each avatar would go by the name of its Zodiac sign.

Character sheet notes:

Enhanced abilities and size modifiers are figured in.

Alternate Powers are marked (alt), Dynamic Alternate Powers are marked (dyn)

Area powers with the Progression feat are shown with a range of sizes (for example, 100 to 1000 ft radius). The character can pick the size every time they use the power.

Attacks section is a quick reference of the primary attacks used by the character. Options that can be used with the attack (for example, Power Attack) are included in parenthesis. The character can make other types of attacks as well—these are just the ones commonly used.

ARIES

PL 10

STR	DEX	CON
10 / --	14 / +2	10 / --
INT	WIS	CHA
14 / +2	10 / --	14 / +2

Defense	20 (15 flat)	Tough	+10 (0 without force field)
Attack	+4 (+8 ranged)	Fort	+3
Init	+2	Ref	+8
Grapple	+4	Will	+5

POWERS

	cost
element control fire 12 (TK fire, area 60 ft radius, dynamic)	37
(dyn) flame blast 12	2
(dyn) flame cone 10 (blast, area cone 100 to 1000 ft long)	2
(dyn) wild fire 10 (blast, area shapeable 50 to 5000 5 ft cubes)	2
(alt) fire cloud 10 (blast, area cloud 50 to 5000 ft diameter)	1
(alt) nova 10 (blast, penetrating, area explosion 100 to 1000 ft radius, no range)	1
(alt) incinerate 9 (blast, concentration, contagious)	1
(dyn) heatwave 10 (fatigue, range, area 50 ft radius)	2
(dyn) wall of fire 7 (blast, sustained, area line 175 to 350 ft long)	2
(dyn) smoke 12 (obscure sight, 5 mile radius)	2
(dyn) environmental control 12 intense heat (5 mile radius)	2
aura of fire 10	20
force field 10	10
immunity fire	5

(all powers fire, cosmic & zodiac descriptors)

FEATS

attack focus ranged 4	evasion
defensive attack	taunt (bluff demoralize)
distract (bluff daze)	

SKILLS

	rank / total
bluff	8 / 10
concentration	8 / 8
notice	8 / 8
sleight of hand	4 / 6

ATTACKS

+8 flame 12 (defensive attack)
area flame 10

TACTICS

Aries is a wily and destructive opponent, flaunting his wildly increased powers and disregarding the collateral damage he causes.

He regularly uses Distract and Taunt as move actions while he sets whole areas of the battlefield on fire. Aries prefers area attacks and can create fire in a variety of patterns. Against easy targets or if he is concerned about getting hit he will use normal fire blasts with Defensive Attack (he cannot use it with area attacks). Aries relies on his fire Aura to deter melee attacks but has no qualms about engulfing himself in a fire cloud if surrounded since he is immune.

With his array Aries can use area attacks (area 10 blast, no progression) and still have 6 pp left to maintain small dynamic alternate powers like Obscure. With his blast 12 he still has 12 pp free.

He can use his heatwave (Fatigue) and smoke (Obscure) to disorient and wear down groups but he is more likely to just try to burn them to the ground. He is not above starting fires that endanger civilians to force heroes to go rescue them.



QUOTES

"It's mine, all mine! Hahahaha!"
 "Because I said so! I've got the Ring, so I'm in charge. Got it?"
 "So then I said 'Hot enough for ya?' Get it, hot enough for ya? It kills me! Well, yeah, he was pretty much on fire by then anyway."

DESCRIPTION

Before being awakened by Pisces, Samuel "Sammy" Jeffries was a small-time supervillain called Pyrophile (PL 6). He used his fire powers to rob banks and armored cars before being locked up. It is a tribute to just how small-time he was that it was regular police who apprehended him, not a superhero.

Jeffries discovered his powers after being trapped in a burning warehouse during a botched heist. He should have been killed, but instead he walked out without a scratch. He never wondered too hard where his powers came from—some kind of mutation he figured.

When Pisces appeared in his cell and explained that he was a potential avatar of the fire-sign Aries, Jeffries assumed the man was crazy. Once Aries realized that the whole Zodiac thing was for real, he betrayed Pisces and took the Ring for himself.

In his heart Aries is still a small-time crook, but Pisces's interminable speeches about prophecy and cosmic destiny have given him delusions of grandeur. It does not hurt that his powers have increased many times over, or that he holds the Zodiac Ring, an artifact of unknown cosmic power. Fate has finally smiled on Samuel Jeffries, and he is going to ride it for everything it is worth.

ZODIAC SIGN

Aries the Ram is a fire-sign. It symbolizes opposition and initiation.

FUTURE AVATARS CONCEPTS

Battering Ram—hunchback speedster who slams into enemies with his curved horns (super-speed, immovable unstoppable only when slamming)

abilities 12 + skills 7 + feats 8 + powers 89 + combat 28 + saves 14 + drawbacks 0 = 158 pp

SCORPIO

PL 10

STR 12 / +1 DEX 26 / +8 CON 22 / +6

INT 12 / +1 WIS 12 / +1 CHA 10 / --

Defense 24 (uncanny) Tough +6
Attack +7 (+14 melee) Fort +6
Init +12 Ref +12
Grapple +15 Will +6

POWERS

whip-lashes 6 (strike, penetrating)
(alt) snare 6 (tether, reversible)
(alt) trip 6 knockback
(all whip are no range, reach 30 ft, indirect 3, split, precise)
enhanced dexterity 12
enhanced constitution 12
swinging 2
leaping 2 (5x distance)
(all powers cosmic & zodiac descriptors)

cost

23
1
1
12
12
2
2

FEATS

acrobatic bluff improved defense
attack focus melee 7 improved disarm
chokehold improved throw
defensive attack improved trip
elusive target takedown attack
evasion uncanny dodge
improved block 2 weapon bind
improved critical 3 (lash)

SKILLS

rank / total

acrobatics 10 / 18
escape artist 8 / 16
intimidate 7 / 7
notice 7 / 8
stealth 8 / 16

ATTACKS

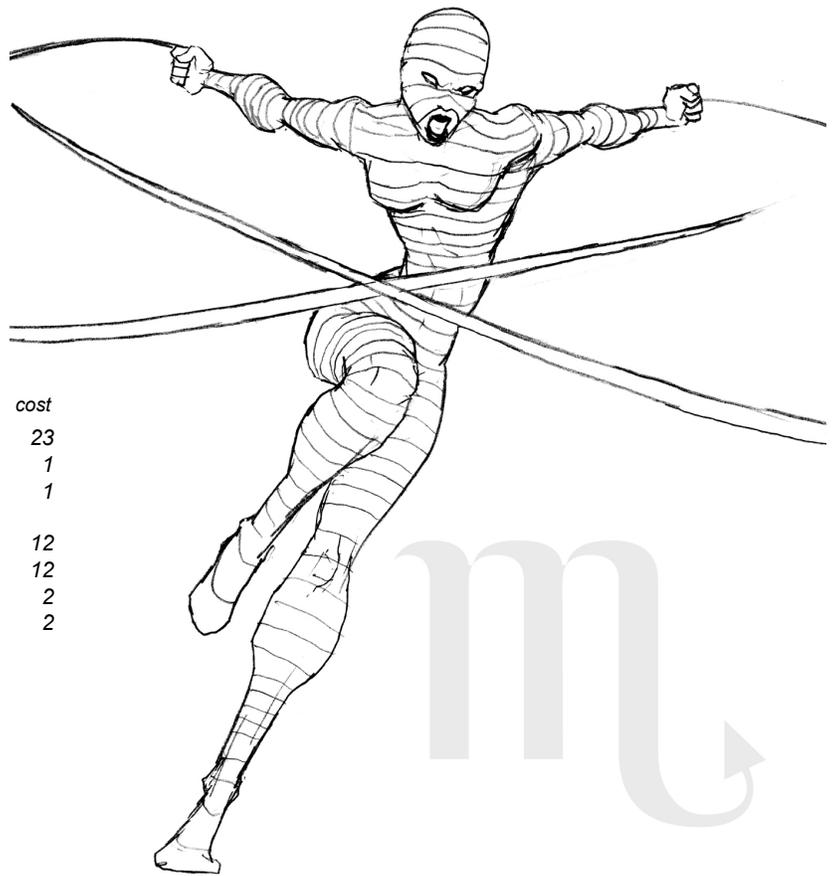
+14 lash 6 penetrating, crit 17-20, 30 ft reach (indirect, split attack, defensive attack)
+14 trip 10 (improved trip, improved throw)
+18 block (weapon bind)

TACTICS

Scorpio uses Acrobatic Bluff to feint as a move action or her Indirect feat to curl her whip behind an opponent to get surprise attacks. She can strike from a distance, taking advantage of spots like ledges to frustrate less mobile opponents, but if other ranged attackers are nearby she will close to get her Elusive Target cover benefit. Scorpio often chooses to do lethal damage with her attacks.

Snare is Instant Lasting so she can coil an opponent in her whip-lash then switch her array next round and attack the bound opponent or other targets with her other whip. She uses Split Attack or Extra Effort to Surge and attack with both lashes in one round.

Her whip-lashes protrude from her body and cannot be taken away from her so they do not count as Devices. If they are severed or cut short she can use her Zodiac powers to extend more almost instantaneously.



QUOTES

"I'm sick of all this talk!"
"Go ahead, run. Make it more fun for me. I may even let you go."
"Dodge all you want, it's only a matter of time before you feel my stin... ARGH! Unnh, you'll pay for that. You'll pay dearly."

DESCRIPTION

Scorpio is everything librarian Alice Danvers was not. Where Danvers was timid, retiring and introverted, Scorpio is aggressive, vindictive and cruel. If there is anything left of Alice Danver's personality Scorpio is hiding it well.

Scorpio's whip-lashes make her a lethal short-range combatant. These thin cables extend from the back of each of her hands. She can control the tension and flexibility at will, using them as cutting whips or stabbing straight out like a spear as she springs and tumbles across the battlefield. She can also retract her lashes entirely leaving only a short nub showing.

When she has the upper hand, Scorpio plays cat-and-mouse with her victims. If pressed, or worse still beaten, she flees to lick her wounds, but the so-called victor can be assured that they now have the dubious honor of occupying Scorpio's every waking thought as she burns for her chance at vengeance.

ZODIAC SIGN

Scorpio the Scorpion is a water-sign. It has some associations with divination and truth saying.

FUTURE AVATARS CONCEPTS

Sibyl-diviner/truth sayer with hypnotic paralyzing gaze

4) Awakening Leo–Football Stadium

Aries uses the Zodiac Ring to find the potential avatar of Leo, and it teleports them smack into the middle of a major league football game. The sold-out crowd's cheers turn to gasps of astonishment as the Zodiac appear on the field just as the quarterback hands off the ball to star running back Darryl Cage, the unwitting potential avatar of Leo.

Not all the football players will not immediately recognize what has happened, so they will continue the play unless the referees blow the whistle. Mayhem breaks out on the field as the football players and supervillains collide, all broadcast live to thousands of households across the nation.

This scene is well-suited to a large and dramatic battle. It can be the end of the Zodiac, or a turning point where the Zodiac is broken by internal schism if you want to continue with the **War of the Zodiac** scenario. Since the action is being televised (in addition to being watched first-hand by thousands of people), it is a good chance for heroes to really shine and make up for previous defeats.

Zodiac Present

Aries w/Ring, Taurus, Scorpio, Gemini, Virgo, Aquarius, Pisces (II) and Capricorn. Leo awakened during the scene.

Enter the Heroes

The game is being televised live, so even if the heroes cannot detect the Ring's powers they will be alerted quickly. They could be taking a break back at their HQ, relaxing and watching their home team on the tube when the trouble starts. And they've got money on this game!

Action

The action for this scene can be broken down into two phases: before Leo is awakened and afterwards. Before Leo is awakened it is a good time to play up the football shticks outlined below. This can give the scene a fun or even light-hearted tone for the players as their heroes slug it out on the gridiron.

Leo's awakening will change all that. In previous scenes, awakening a new avatar just added another character to the Zodiac, but Leo is a menace of nearly primal fury. He will attack anyone to demonstrate his dominance, endangering Zodiac, hero and civilian alike.

As soon as he is awakened, Leo roars and makes for Aries, attacking anyone who gets in his way. His Zodiac instincts drive him to seize the Ring, plus Aries has probably declared himself as Leo's would-be leader, a claim that cannot go unchallenged. Aries's fire has no effect on Leo so he will scream for help from the other Zodiac, particularly Taurus. They may or may not help him, though Taurus is unlikely to turn his back on his buddy. It is a rude awakening for Aries, shattering any illusions he had that he could retain leadership of the Zodiac just by virtue of having the Ring.

If nothing is stopping Leo, Aries will beg for Aquarius to nullify his powers. In the middle of a knock-down drag-out fight, this could result in Leo being hit by a super-powered attack (whether from heroes or Zodiac) before it is realized he is defenseless. That could accidentally kill Leo outright (GM's Fiat). Leo could also burn out his powers by exhausting himself (see **Changing Avatars Back to Normal**, page 20).

If you plan on this battle being the big finale, Leo should snatch the Ring away from Aries if no one else has already done so, preventing

the Zodiac from escaping. This forces a showdown between the Zodiac and the heroes.

If you want this to lead into **War of the Zodiac**, the Ring breaks into two pieces when Leo tries to wrest it from Aries (see **Splitting the Ring**, page 6). Capricorn rebels and tries to take one half. Aries may be left with the other. See **Picking Sides** (page 30) to determine how the avatars should split up. The schism should occur after Leo runs amuck—if the Zodiac splits up before that they might be forced to unite again to fight off Leo. If the Ring is not broken by Leo, it could break when Capricorn tries to seize it instead. If the Ring is not broken here the schism could occur behind the scenes, but it is preferable to have the heroes witness the break up of the Zodiac.

Bystanders

football players (Soldier, M&M Chapter 11, Str 16, Con 16, add All-Out Attack, Fast Overrun, Improved Overrun feats, replace equipment with armor 2, use appropriate attacks like slam or overrun instead of punches)
 sports fans (Bystanders, M&M Chapter 11)
 security guards (Thugs, M&M Chapter 11, replace equipment with handcuffs, radio)
 police (M&M, Chapter 11)

Revelations

Conflict between Zodiac avatars. Possibly the breaking of the Ring and the avatars taking sides.

Shticks

Get in the game—Someone grabs the Zodiac Ring, and heroes and villains start chasing each other down the field trying to recover it. Football players get caught up in the moment and play offense or defense depending on which end zone the Ring bearer is unwittingly running towards—naturally the heroes wind up on the same side as their home team. The announcers try to call the action over the stadium PA and the crowd goes wild!

Fans on the field—Fans jump the barricades and charge the field, irate that anyone interferes with their team. Rioting fans could prove a threat to heroes and villains alike, and certainly a distraction to heroes forced to take their eyes off the Zodiac to prevent anyone getting hurt. Gemini will use any crowds (or football players) to his advantage, fueling the emotional fires.

Low-flying blimp—What's a football game without a blimp? Originally providing aerial television coverage, the blimp dips closer to get a better look at the chaos erupting on the field. A stray (or intentional) energy blast could rip a gaping hole in the gas bag and bring it careening down on the stadium crowd, requiring heroic intervention. Oh the humanity! [note: Blimps use helium not hydrogen. Helium is not flammable, but it will make your voice squeaky, which could prove embarrassing when a hero appears before the cameras to take credit for the save.]

Aftermath

If you are not continuing with the **War of the Zodiac** scenario, a win for the heroes could mean the end of the Zodiac, with the heroes fighting to victory on national television.

If Leo survives with his powers intact he will go his own way, independent of the other Zodiac, creating a completely separate menace for the heroes to deal with. Or he could demand complete fealty from the other avatars and enforce it with an iron fist, a volatile situation for as long as it lasts.

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