

The following is an excerpt from *Pariah*, a roleplaying game by Mike Jones. Copyright © 2001, all rights reserved. In *Pariah*, the players take on the roles of teens just coming to grips with their supernormal powers.

The complete text is available for purchase from Rogue Publishing at www.roguepublishing.com.

The World of Pariah

When did you first realize that you were different? No, I'm not asking when you first realized you had extraordinary powers. That's an event that many of us never even remember—they've just always been there. No, what I'm asking is when it first occurred to you that your unique abilities weren't normal—that you were truly and drastically different than your friends and family.

Sure, sometimes those two experiences can be one and the same. For those who come to their powers later in life, the realization of difference is immediate. The girl who never does anything "special" until the day of the homecoming dance when she suddenly lights the whole gym on fire. The shy new kid who always keeps to himself until some bully goes one step too far, and without warning, the new kid feels himself invading his attacker's mind and sending the bully into epileptic fits. Sometimes, the power is like that—it comes crashing in all at once, leaving its wielder as shell-shocked and horrified as those around him.

Much more often, though, the power is there like an old friend long before we learn to be ashamed of it. Before we learn to hide what we are. The kindergartner sees it in the frightened eyes of her playmates when her "imaginary friend" sends toys dancing around the room. The junior high student learns it when one too many of his "lucky guesses" come true and his friends begin shunning him as if he were the creator of bad fortune and not just a hapless messenger. The varsity basketball player bears it in the fearful whispers and vicious gossip after one too many of her opponents is mysteriously pushed to the ground after getting too close to her and the ball.

That moment is the worst. You've grown up your whole short life knowing who you are and what you can do, and never thinking a thing of it, because you just assume that everyone can. Oh, maybe you're a little more talented than others—a little different, but on the inside, you can sleep well knowing

that we're really all the same. And then it all comes crashing down. You're a freak. A monster. Your phenomenal, beautiful talents have just become some terrible burden to fear and loathe and hide away from the rest of the world. Never again can you truly be yourself without suffering the scorn and derision of the people you care for most. You become an outcast in your own life. A pariah.

That moment, more than anything else, truly defines who we are. For most of us, it is a moment etched in stone. Every future confrontation, every twist of fate that threatens to reveal who we are bears back to the shame and confusion of that first time. No matter how hardened you think you've become, every time you see that look on the face of someone who's just figured out the truth, suddenly you're five years old again, feeling like you're going to wet your pants and wondering why Mommy and Daddy look like they're scared of you.

I don't wish that on anyone.

What is Pariah?

Pariah is a roleplaying game of supernormal powers set in a paranoid society where the gifted are pursued and persecuted simply for being different. Each player assumes the role of a child or young adult with supernormal powers. The characters must struggle to survive and succeed in a world that has no love for them. The government hunts them down to exploit their powers, yet officially covers up their very existence. Ancient secret societies seek to use them or destroy them for their own ends. Normal people fear and shun them when their powers are revealed. The gifted live in fear of discovery all the time. There are few whom they can turn to, and no one they can ever fully trust.