



Series by Vito Viscomi, Jumpchain Gauntlet by Aehriman

“Hey.”

A hand shaking your shoulder is the first thing you’re aware of.

“**HEY!** Wake up! Who are you!? Where are we!?”

There’s somebody standing over you, a stranger, a third figure curled up in the corner of what looks like a concrete cell. No door, just an air vent near the very high ceiling and is that an old typewriter?

“I don’t-” You pause, panic gripping you. “*I don’t know*, on either count.”

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Welcome, gentle viewers, to the newest season of *the Hollow*, the world’s hottest VR gameshow! As always, our contestants have had their memories erased, to prevent abuse of metaknowledge. Not to fear, each has a little slip of paper in their pocket with their name on it. As further handicaps each player has a secret power they’ll discover as they go, and each team can summon your friendly host, *moi*, five times by saying “Help, please!” I’ll give them some cryptic advice and warp them to a random zone to keep things interesting.

Today we have a special treat, a Jumper and their Companions. Probably isn’t the first time they’ve woken up in a strange place with no memories and strange powers they don’t understand, not that they know that. As usual, death of any member of the Jumper’s three-man team will lead to their disqualification, so they’ll miss out on the grand prize for solving each puzzle and task and confronting this season’s final boss. Perhaps their own Companions will beat them out!

As this is a Gauntlet, there shall be no powers from previous Jumps, bar the Body Mod, but failure has no real consequences. You start with **0 choice points** and must earn them through

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DRAWBACKS

DLC (+100 cp) It seems the size of the Hollow game map, and the number of challenges you must complete without dying, has just doubled. You can take this up to three times, each doubling the scale of your challenge again.

Draw Aggro (+100 cp) There's almost always at least a few monster spawns in the Hollow, to provide something to flee, outwit or overcome. Well, the monsters seem drawn to you now, and extra aggressive, from the mightiest boss to the lowliest hound, and they will always prioritize attacking you over your teammates and competitors.

High Bandwidth (+100 cp) Something has gone wrong with your connection, and you get almost constant migraines.

Lag (+100 cp) Something is off with your reactions, whether fighting or running, you also seem to respond just a fraction slower in a crisis, as if your limbs need a moment to move. Hope that's never important.

MMO (+100 cp) It *does* seem weird that there's only two teams, given how easily one death can lead to group elimination. So be it, then, you can take this drawback up to three times, each purchase adding a new team of rivals to the mix.

Helpful (+200 cp) You have a desire to help people. It may lead you to unlooked for treasures, but is more likely to bog you down in pointless sidequests or get you to lower your guard.

Iron Man Mode (+200 cp) Time to ratchet up the difficulty a lot, only a handful of gamers ever get to play the Hollow and you're one of the rarest of all! We can have challenges that would be all but impossible for ordinary gamers.

Rash (+200 cp) You're impulsive, prone to losing your temper and making snap judgements. Hope you don't make any mistakes you can't come back from!

Glitch (+300 cp) There's been a glitch in the matrix, kinda literally. Things just stop working, areas become impassable and it's only getting worse as time goes on.

Some Team (+300 cp) Your teammates are the worst. Nasty people, paranoid, always at each other's throats. It's a full-time job trying to keep peace and get everyone moving in the same direction, and it's only going to get worse the longer you're in the game.

Completionist (+400 cp) That was a real nice exploit you pulled, proper time-saver and that matters in a race, but you robbed yourself of some of that full Hollow experience. Any time you clear the game without seeing and interacting with all of the content, you reset to the start, giving you another chance to lose it all. The game will be shuffled with new elements and a randomized order so you will only benefit so much from remembering it.

Also, any +300 drawbacks will continue to get worse.

Hollow Life (+400 cp) Eager for the sequel? If you win you end up home, except reality is broken and hitting you with your greatest fears. You're in the Hollow Life simulator, and if you want to live and move on, you're gonna have to escape and strongarm Weird Guy into getting you a place on a secure server *before* anyone can win the newest round of the Hollow.



PERKS

Lucky (-100 cp) You're very lucky. Not buy-a-lotto-ticket-now lucky, but a coin toss is more like 80% for you, and whatever else may come, pure chance is not gonna lock you into a game over.

Outdoorsy (-100 cp) You know quite a bit about wilderness survival. How to camp, how to start a fire without matches, how to find food and water. It could come in quite handy for some map sections.

Outside-The-Box (-100 cp) You can't solve every puzzle conventionally. You can take yourself outside of your normal perspective, look at things from a different angle, try different solutions and creative strategies.

Patience (-100 cp) Haste makes waste. You don't get frustrated and need to quit just because the challenge is difficult, and can keep on working with as much creativity and skill in the twelfth hour as when you first started.

Puzzler (-100 cp) You easily get 'in the zone' when under a time pressure, and have enough experience with adventure games to tell what's an important clue/item and what's set dressing, and at least a vague idea of the general structure of puzzles, riddles and challenges you're likely to face. In short, you're a gamer.

Friendly (-200 cp) You make friends very easily. Maybe it's how you always make a good first impression, or your welcoming smile. You're skilled at playing the peacemaker and getting your team focused on the goal. They may hate each other, but they'll care about you.

"Help, Please!" (-200 cp) Five times you can call for help, and Weird Guy (the host) will appear to offer advice and/or warp you to safety. To make things more interesting, our Jumper has five uses independent of those given to the team. In future Jumps, you can summon Weird Guy five times as in the Hollow.



ITEMS

Satchel (free) A pack that keeps the contents safe and dry. Bigger on the inside, but not so big as to provide infinite inventory space.

Map (-50 cp) A map of the Hollow, which fills in new areas when you arrive in them. In future Jumps, this applies wherever you go.

Keyring (-50 cp) A ring with five keys on it. Guaranteed to be a big time-saver later, or provide access to hidden areas. In future Jumps, the keys will align to five important locations and/or chests.

Wrench (-100 cp) A handy tool, or weapon, that can fit any kind of bolt or pipe.

Flashlight (-100 cp) May it be a light for you in dark places, where all other lights go out. Okay, mostly the points are to have this available at all times.

Medicine (-200 cp) A miraculous healing potion. Two doses, refills monthly.

Ishibo (-200 cp) A staff made from the arm of a treant, the Ishibo holds vast mystic powers to enhance the physicality and powers of whoever wields it.

Super-Weapon (-200 cp) A bulky death-ray. Excellent for taking out any monsters that get in your way, or terrain features.

Digi-Block Contact Lens (-300 cp) Why, you cheaty-mcCheatface! You wore some of those special contacts to protect you from the mind-wipe! You get to keep your memories and understand from the start what's going on! In future Jumps these protect you from other forms of memory-alteration and mind control.



FRIENDS

Maybe the real prize is the friends we made along the way?

Fire-Forged Friends (FREE!) You can invite any of your teammates or rivals to join you in a never-ending adventure, the Jumpchain. Whether they're ready to leave their lives and world behind, well that's up to them.

Socially Awkward (50 cp/Variable) Not good at making friends? You can import two Companions to fill out your team for 50 cp. They also get memory-wiped and lose any powers but what they choose. Perhaps you'll become better friends from having met all over in circumstances where none of you have an inherent advantage? Any further points you donate are given to each of them.

Payback Time (+100 cp) Or... you can import up to three Companions on a rival team, each with 600 cp of their own to build from. That's enough for three powers, or two and all their memories. For each Companion you add this way, take +100 cp. Only the winning team gets to retain their purchases.



SECRET ABILITY

What you've all been waiting for. You get one free, and after that each is 300 cp. Secondary abilities are not unknown on the show.



Aquatic Adaptation - You can breathe underwater and swim at tremendous speeds. Enough to drag an ice flo at speeds comparable to a motorboat, or form a waterspout by swimming in circles. Cold water temperatures don't bother you in the slightest.



Electrokinesis - You can shoot lightning from your hands! Very direct power, not much use outside combat or charging things.



Engineering Knowledge - You have an instinctive knowledge of mechanics and engineering, such that you could fix up a crashed biplane or even a flying saucer.



Flight - You can levitate and propel yourself through the air, and at least one passenger. You can fly faster than you can run. Inside the Hollow, beware of map limitations and invisible barriers.



Meteorokinesis - You can control the weather! Make it rain, or blow others around with wind. A very versatile power, as long as you're outdoors.



Pyrokinesis - You can conjure fire and fireblasts from your hands. With enough practice, you can learn to fly this way, not as quickly or physics-defyingly nimble as the Flight power.



Size Shifting - You can shrink down to a size of six inches, or expand to tower over buildings. Square cube law only ever seems to work to your benefit. In your giant form, you are resistant to other powers to a degree.



Super Speed - Gotta go fast! You can move quick enough to vanish into a blur, to race over water and not sink.



Super Strength - A brute force power, the raw strength to smash boulders with your hands, the durability to shrug off getting hit by the same. A degree of enhanced speed and agility as well.



Supersonic Shriek - Your scream can stun, deafen, disorient or blow away enemies or projectiles.



Telekinesis - A simple case of mind over matter. You can levitate and move things by thinking hard. You can move a lot of weight at one time and many discrete items. You cannot use your powers on yourself.



Teleportation - You can travel instantly, vanishing and reappearing someplace else. This is restricted by line of sight and a cooldown of a couple seconds.



Zoolingualism - Welcome to the world of Dr. Doolittle. You can walk with the animals, talk with the animals and if you help or bribe them, usually get a favor or two.



GAME OVER

Well, you can't very well stay on a gameshow your whole life. The only question before you move on is how did your game end?

VICTORY - Congratulations! Your prize is getting to keep your purchases as part of the all-important Body Mod that you keep with power-loss drawbacks or in gauntlets like this.

DEFEAT - Oh well, give our players a warm round of applause for effort. They can move on without any ill-will. No purchases from the Jump-doc, but they do get the Hollow T-shirts, mugs and other merch!