

9 Backstory

Name: Actini, or "9", jokingly refers to himself as "Regent" due to being a male who hijacked the position of hive queen

Species: Augmented *Dolichovespula maculata* (bald-faced hornet)

Sex: Physiologically female or intersex, depending on depiction but mentally identifies as male

Age: Unknown, but a few years at most, probably

Height: 6ft 0in / 1.82m

Weight: 120lbs / 54.4kg

Siblings: 9 was created as part of a series of scientific experiments so has 'batch-mates'. The most notable are the abandoned or failed prototypes 86, 87, and 88, named Henrie, Marie, and Curie, respectively. They are collectively capable of demonstrating mild telekinetic powers.

Powers: Psionics. 9 can move and lift items, and can skim-read more complex minds (although he often has difficulty understanding the thoughts he reads at first)

Misc: Usually physically inert or inactive. Maintains an aura, the intensity of which corresponds to his mood.

How 9's Psionics Power Works

Psions can control others in two ways, either:

- *telekinetically* (the 'brute force' method, by physically moving the axon rods in their subject's brain to send the signal), or
- *telepathically* (by supplying suggestions to the subject's mind that are then obeyed).

9 has considerable psionic powers and uses a combination of these methods, but is able to further maximise his control of his subjects with a sleight of hand. He uses the brains of the insects he controls as temporary data storage for the instructions he wishes to spread, and then uses his own brain as the control centre (not the storage centre). He can also borrow and harness extra processing power from the insect minds he skims, and use it to channel his instructions further.

This creates a positive feedback loop in which the more minds he uses, the more capacity he has to expand his reach. If he is able to access enough processing power, he can overcome the difficulties presented by more complex brains.

However, he has difficulty with accessing the sentient information held in other brains. He can glean a little bit of detail but has difficulty possessing that detail for himself. This is due to the fact that he has difficulty with having higher sentient thoughts of his own due to being a hornet, and his social dysfunction further complicates this. He can however slowly learn to comprehend a sentient thought.

He has difficulty controlling a sentient mind the way he would a wasp's, and he also has

the same problem in reverse: controlling a wasp's mind by interacting with it as if it was a sentient mind. If he tries to dump too much information into another individual then this carries the risk of shorting out his connection to them, causing brain damage to the individual, or over-riding the very information he is trying to access.

However, insects have a way of drawing processing capacity, so solely using insects dilutes 9's psionic power by draining it, even as he uses their brains for storage space. If he could use sentient brains as part of his network then he could expand his reach exponentially, however sentient brains presently present too much of a challenge for him to overcome.

Regarding the telekinetic side of 9's power, his telekinetic strength varies wildly depending on how far his network is spread at any one time. Without relying on a network he can lift up to 27kg/60lbs, which allows him to scoot and push crates around, before augmenting himself and starting to bash, toss, and bat them about. When he hits his peak he can propel things with force to crush concrete, bury things into it, or create slag metal from super-friction.

9 is an original character. He is more than a wasp, and not a human but was raised by a team of them, so faces a never-ending struggle to reconcile his psychological pull to be one of the hive-mind and a higher desire to be an individual. He mostly keeps himself busy by directing swarms as he was created to do, and only dedicates time to that life-long struggle when he feels as if he can.

Trust & Confidence

(newborn)

9 started life in a test tube as a grub, although it can be said that he had two births: the one in which he emerged from his test tube as a grub, and the one in which he pupated. Initially he was non-sentient and his very first awareness, at its most primitive phase, was of being in a natural environment. He and the other grubs grown for this experiment were nurtured as best as was possible to heighten the chances of them growing up to be healthy and able to perform optimally.

He was the 89th attempt at the creation of insects that would be bigger and stronger; the initial experiments yielded more intelligent insects which were capable of better communication that dovetailed well with their eusocial nature, and this prompted the team to begin a new arm of this research project. 9 himself was the most successful of the experiments from the 'smarter' arm.

The original aim of this research project was to create an insect that could better-coordinate the world's dwindling population of pollinating insects. This was a noble enough venture, and a secondary goal was added of creating an insect that could communicate well enough to coordinate the more aggressive species of wasp and

hornet, thereby reducing the risk they posed to humans. However, some members of the team recognised a financial opportunity in the creation of such super-intelligent insects and continued to work quietly within the team as they lined up the opportunity to serve their own interests.

Freedom & Self-Determination

(toddlerhood)

9's first awareness occurred during his pupae stage, when he began to have early, coherent thoughts. For him, this was the start of his 'toddler' stage. While he was not yet physically mobile, he had the mental capacity to be aware of his own existence and of his desire to be able to move (coupled with his inability to, since he was inside a tough-walled chrysalis. His first thoughts (at least, of which he was aware) were unpleasant and felt like an intrusion or an illness, akin to being scratched on the back of his head, or of having a migraine or concussion. This was for two reasons. The first was that as a hornet his brain was not designed to be able to manage higher mental function; a straightforward 'scaling up' of its abilities did not automatically equate to a talent for the brain function that the research team intended him to have, and their efforts to engineer him as such were imperfect. The other was the frustration of not being able to use his brain function - the inside of his chrysalis was a boring and lonely place.

However, it should be said that his capacity for psionics did not awaken until he hatched. Up until that point, he had the capacity for higher thought but was not aware of the existence of other minds, so did not reach for them and certainly didn't detect them.

Multiple researchers worked on his creation and tended to him during his very early life while still in pupa stage, and their impressions of him were widely divided, with some considering him purely an experiment with no emotional attachment to him as an individual, others wary that the outcome could be dangerous, others who felt irritated by the experiment and found it to be a distraction from something more important, and others who felt joy and excitement about 9's potential as a research aid. Others yet considered him an equal to humans in development.

Of the researchers, Dr. Cavendish was among the most positive about 9. He felt confident that he could trust 9 on the basis that he had had made this creature. This prompted a level of friction among the team as several other members felt disgust, concern, and apprehension about 9 himself, and the general situation. Dr. Cavendish was not the only one who felt positively disposed towards 9, but nobody else was more excited for 9's emergence from the pupa as him.

When 9 hatched, he emerged into the world with an adult body. His pupation time had not been long enough to give his brain all of the time it needed to mature, and 9 was still in a sense unready for the world when he emerged into it. His ultimate naivete at this time only compounded this. Indeed, his first important revelation was that he was an individual, not a hive.

One of the earliest ways that 9 began to make sense of the world was to assign himself a gender identity. He was biologically female, however, the first beings he found himself surrounded by were humans - and humans of either sex do not look like hornets of the corresponding sex. After observing the researchers for a while 9 came to like the concept of masculinity, and adopted the gender identity for himself.

One or two members of the research team tried to reason with 9 that he was, in fact, female (indeed, he had a stinger, which only female hornets have), but 9 responded by saying, "Females do not stand on two legs, Doctor. Nor do they hum, sing, or fail to lay eggs. We suspect the matter is largely irrelevant – but we like the 'male' idea better."

9 may also have found this insistence on a gender identity helped him to feel more secure in his uniqueness among the human researchers. He was already aware that he was very different from the humans, not to mention less well-educated or savvy about the workings of the world. To assert himself and his ability to define himself helped to make this a more manageable situation. The fact that choosing a masculine gender identity in spite of evidence to the contrary didn't make logical sense only helped to underline the fact that 9 was asserting his own personal identity.

9 developed his psionic abilities after he breached the pupa and started using them to gather information from the researchers about how he was supposed to 'be' and 'do' in the world. As a very unique being he did not have a natural place in the ecosystem so could not rely on his instincts, even though he still had instincts, and he was ready to start being active long before the researchers were able to set him to work, whether that was productive work or the self-development typical of normal young children.

For any human, this period of identifying who the self is, what it means, how to be in the world, and how to negotiate the existence and sometimes conflicting desires of other people, would be a natural task. A big and often difficult one, but one that they were made to be able to undertake.

9 on the other hand was a hornet, and hornets do not have a toddler or young child developmental stage. Normal hornets do not need to develop a clearly-defined self or identify their personal potential or limitations; they go developmentally from infancy to older childhood (mentally at least; they have adult bodies in their equivalent of older childhood). Being created as a higher being like a hornet but with far higher functioning, 9 found that he had to negotiate self-determination and ambition development with a brain that was suboptimal for the purpose.

Therefore, his development through this stage was decidedly shaky and he emerged from it with a fractured mind, caught between the need to be an individual and his intrinsic hive-mind. The fact that 9, after he had hatched, began to be capable of reading the humans' thoughts only confused him further. He understood some of what he read but the underlying assumptions, biases, and instincts of humans conflicted with his own in many ways. His controversial nature among the humans, and their resulting

attitudes towards him (which were wildly different from one member of the team to the next) were likely to have hindered any progress 9 made.

Ambition

(young childhood)

Initially 9 accepted his role of bee migration management, honey bee protection, bee breeding, and pest control with enthusiasm. This was a role that he could fit into, something that, in a world of things that didn't make sense to 9, was easy. In fact, he took such pride in it that he considered himself over-qualified for the role.

Breeding the bees and other pollinating insects contributed in its own minor way to 9's gender confusion by casting 9 as an spectator or coordinator to the world of sexual reproduction, not a participant.

As he continued to do this work, 9 reflected on his life so far and realised that he had two life goals. The ones assigned to him were one of those when seen as a package deal, while his self-actualisation as an almost entirely unique creature comprised the other. He dedicated time to working out how he could merge the two so as to achieve both, as his insect-management time tended to impact on, and limit, his ability to spend time self-actualising. One solution to this was to attempt to learn to control humans. If humans could be controlled the way he controlled insects then he could theoretically prevent them from damaging their world in a way that necessitated pollinator management. A secondary benefit to this would be that he could manage people's minds so that they understood him better.

He only reached this line of thinking very gradually, and when he eventually experimented with it, he discovered just how difficult using his psionics on more complex brains was.

Productivity

(older childhood)

9 mostly accepted his role as insect-coordinator and rationalised his own reasons for complying. Mostly this involved convincing himself that nobody else was as capable of this task as he was, and in many ways he was right.

This life stage was the earliest one that more or less corresponded to an insect's life: the stage where a person becomes strong, rational, and experienced enough to start to become productive in society. Since productivity is very much what hornets, bees, and other similar insects are about, 9 began to feel a little more comfortable with his mindset when he reached this stage.

However, that is not to say that 9 found it easy. He had failed to complete most of his life

stages up to this point, to a degree that provided a good psychological basis on which to continue to develop. In other words, he had had a rough start in life and was now on distinctly shaky ground when it came to growing up further. 9 was already showing signs of what a human might call mental illness from his efforts to make sense of everything he had learned, using a partially-insectoid mind. His symptoms were similar to those of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

As a side-effect of this, 9 was not a playful character. During his time in the research facility, he would sometimes be amused by various games introduced to him by the researchers, but ultimately found them confusing as he didn't understand their purpose (not least because he found it difficult to see a given course of action such as game-playing as fun on its own merit, as it seemed not to have a concrete goal. 9's skewed ability to self-develop the way humans do made it difficult for him to recognise the concept of fun, in the context of these games).

9 became very prone to wanting to work alone and to see himself as the only one who could complete a given task. For some tasks he was right: psionically directing insects was something only he could do, after all. However, this bias went beyond what was strictly logical and 9 generally preferred to work alone regardless of the task.

This was for a handful of reasons. Firstly, working as a team effort with humans meant having to understand humans, and 9 found humans confusing so preferred to minimise their presence while he had a job to do. Secondly, his early life experiences had marked him out as the naive one among a group of very well informed others (the researchers) and he therefore continued to feel a need to prove himself. As a result, he could sometimes brush off offers for help even if they would indeed be helpful.

Child to Adult Transition (*adolescence*)

With 9 being physically a fully-functioning adult, and with nobody more adult than himself to turn to, he floundered in this life stage for a long while. Acting out adolescence, with its aims of identifying the self, differentiating from some and twinning with others, took much of its time and attention.

His routine was quite constant for a while, as it was dictated in large part by the timetable of the lab. During these times 9 would sometimes reach forth with his mind and 'see' other minds beyond the lab, which he called "adding the odd splotches of colour on a black canvas". These minds, these people, had unfamiliar feelings.

The nearest 9 had to a role model was the chief technician overseeing him, although this man was more of a father figure than a role model - 9 was supposed to be overseen by him, not mimic him.

9 was also aware that some members of the team disapproved of him or the lead

researcher, and some went as far as to believe that either needed to be replaced, controlled, or expunged. This was the nearest 9 got to having enemies, and at times he became more obsessive about this than was necessary. It offered him a yardstick (whether it was appropriate or not) of people whom he did not want to be like, and gave his very active mind something to focus on.

It is certainly true that 9 did not have any relationships at the time. After all, there was nobody around who would make a suitable candidate. More to the point however, he didn't grasp the concept of sexual maturation, especially emotional sexual maturation.

Closeness in Relationships *(young adulthood)*

Being surrounded by humans meant that 9 was considered an adult not when he reached physical maturity, but when the humans around him considered him to have a 'grown up' enough mind. In addition to this, the small pool of humans with whom he interacted in the lab, he was always like to be considered a dependent, rather than an independent adult.

9's personality had stabilised somewhat, even if his internal mental state did not reflect what the team might observe. He could be domineering, standoffish (he literally preferred to keep a physical distance and observe people from there, both visually and with the use of his psionic ability), and intimidating (although this was difficult for him to control. Being a high-powered psion and a 6-foot wasp had a way of intimidating people whether or not 9 had that intention).

Intimacy was always likely to be hard for 9 given his intimidating presence and uniqueness, but also due to some factors at play during his creation. Although rationally 9 knows that he is female, he has reason to believe that that is not 100% true. Even if a sexual relationship was even moderately likely, 9 would have trouble knowing what he would be expected to do. This subject can upset 9 somewhat and leave him feeling uncomfortable. He does, on occasion, experiment with cross-dressing to help him connect with, and understand, his feminine side more clearly.

With so little interest (and even less reciprocated) in having many interpersonal relationships, 9 focused on work. Despite his higher functioning he still partially had a hive-mind, so he felt that he had a natural place when he controlled his swarms. His belief about managing the swarms amounted to, "I was built to do this. To not do so would be a waste, especially as I am the best/only one capable to." At around this time he came to call himself "Regent", as his way of describing his relationship to the swarms.

However, he still enjoyed exploring the potential of personal experiences. He continued to experience a conflict of interest between working with his tiny kin and having more life experiences to help feed his tremendous need to get to know himself.

Passing on Responsibilities

(older adulthood)

With 9 being so unwilling to reproduce, the extreme unlikelihood of him taking on the role of mentor for somebody else (especially for his role, which he cannot teach as it is intrinsic to him), and with his stubbornness about giving up his role in the world, he is likely to hold on to his role for as long as he can.

The most likely scenario for him giving up his role of swarm-management would be letting go of the feeling that the task is important enough to manage, and to allow the insects to go their own way. If he does this he will be free to spend more time exploring his self.

End of Life

(old age)

9 is deeply uncomfortable about the idea of his life coming to an end, and this could be for good reason, beyond the mundane possibility that, as he learns more about himself, he finds that he cannot find the companionship that he would possibly end up pining for.

On a more paranormal level, legends speak of psychics who are capable of detecting spirits and ghosts, and 9 is not familiar with these himself. The idea that he might begin to detect the presence of people who have passed would indicate the existence of a life after death.

Similarly, 9's mind is so fractured, and he is so prone towards self-identifying as part of a hive-mind, that there are times when he believes that he is more of a coordination function for insects than an actual person himself, and merely erroneously perceives himself to be a person because he exists inside an insect-shaped body.

There are so many questions with unknowable answers that arise as a result of thinking about the end of his life that 9 tries not to think about it. It scares him, and he despises questions he doesn't know the answer to.

Credits

Based on theory by:

Erikson, E., (1951) 'Childhood and Society', W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. chapter 7.

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~Hayley, The Character Consultancy