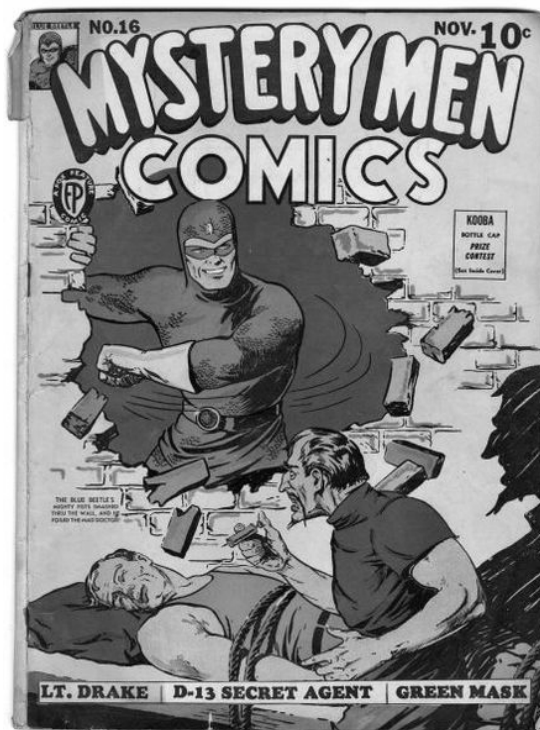
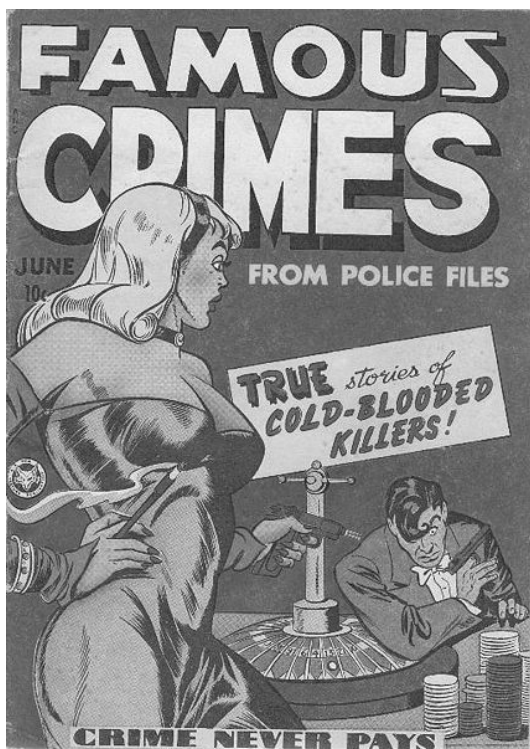


Of G-Men and Supermen



A 24-hour role-playing game about "Who Watches the Watchers?"
Based on the Theme "Power Squid" for the Spring 2009 1km1kt.net contest

By Chainsaw Aardvark

Started 5/26/09 at 12:05 pm
Ended 5/27/09 at 11:45 am

The G-man in the window sighed, adjusted his hat, and lit another cigarette. As the menthol feeling filled my lungs, I realized that it wasn't a window, but a mirror. Damn. When did I get so old? It seems like just yesterday that I was a kid enjoying his comic books and now I've got gray temples and a conservative tie. When did this happen?

Oh yeah – when those comic books came to life.

A lot of people are willing to call them heroes, and that is not wholly wrong. “Comics” do pluck falling airliners out of the sky, and stop ice ray wielding whack jobs.

But we have taken to calling them “Squids”. Because they've got tentacles that reach into everything, making our life pretty complicated. After all, they're vigilantes, who refuse to reveal their identities, and become involved in the law with no certification or training. Their authority issues from the fact they can break what seem to be basic laws of physics, much as the Reds rule by the barrel of a gun.

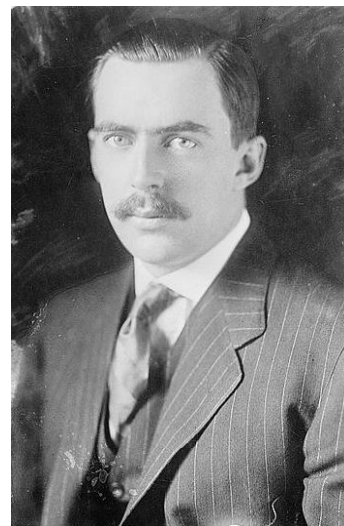
What does it mean to have faith in god when you see miracle workers every day?

If a so-called hero wanted to level an entire city, what could we do to stop them?

Well, our organization for one. We might not succeed, but our agents would try their hardest anyway. To do any less would be un-American.

Everyday we get our orders from Mr. Keeton. Everyday he seems ten years older. It can't be easy to direct an agency like this when his twin brother is one of the people we watch extra closely.

I have to wonder who is the hero in this amazing tale. Is “Normal” Keeton ultimately the white knight charging down chaos and disorder? Or are these people to be taken at face value, and Keeton himself the villain?



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Glossary

- Comic: a term for super powered people, due to their resemblance to figures from illustrated entertainment.
- Corruption: the desire of a comic to act in their own self interest, rather than as the fictions characters they resemble.
- Draw: Testing against an attribute, expertise, or skill by taking from a deck of cards.
- Folio: The description of a character.
- G-man: Government Man, slang term for an agent, usual of the FBI or BATF.
- H.E.R.O.S.: Headquarters for Enforcement & Registration of Observed Supernatural – Government Comic Control Agency
- Illustrator: aka Game Master, the director of the interactive “movie” known as role-playing.
- Shift: Luck or drama, the affinity of those in a tight situation to push further than otherwise possible.
- Squid: Derogatory term for a “Comic”, refereeing to their otherworldly seeming and unknown reach.

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Questions and comments are always welcome; the author may be contacted via E-mail at
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 Or on the forums of 1km1kt.net:
<http://www.1km1kt.net/community/>

Power Squid requires the following to play:
 A deck of playing cards, including the jokers
 Spare paper and writing utensils
 At least two players –
 One to take the role of the “Illustrator” who paints the environments, controls the background characters, and acts a director for the drama. The other(s) are the government agents

Top Secret
Government Issue Only
Re: Project Olympus 5/13/55 status report

Dear Mr. Hayes

Some time ago I expressed my dissatisfaction with the elements under my control. While it was quite clear that many of the other scientists "recruited" by "Project Paperclip" were behind the programs that allowed the Germans to advance their technology so rapidly, it seemed that the ones I became responsible for were, as I so officially put it, "A few nuts short of a fruitcake".

However, my initial report was may have been made in some haste and frustration. It seems that "Mr. Jung" and "Mr. Zeitgeist" have in fact made some progress with their "Gestalt Device". As you note from the attached report several otherwise inexplicable phenomena occurred in the lab. For the time being we have moved to the adjacent building, and my adjunct is considering the design specifications for a new test area - asbestos fireproofing and enameled walls being the foremost requirements.

The ramifications of this "manifestation of collective desires" may indeed be more powerful than either the so called "jet engines" or "atomic propulsion" that the other teams are working with, while at the same time being far harder to control. Far too much so, in my opinion.

I have been made aware of the possibility that I have a counterpart behind the Iron Curtain. However, the new premier seems to be a far more reasonable person, and would not stand for the potential danger this represents. A system based on the repression and control of its people would not long last if said inhabitants could fly, lift an M4 Sherman, and take a dozen Garand bullets without flinching.

Then again, I don't know if a democracy could either.

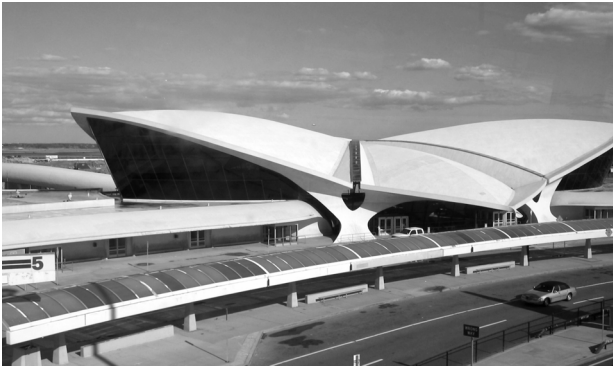
With all due respect, I believe that the project should be canceled immediately. No longer because I am certain that it will produce no results, but because I am uncertain as to if society can safely abide its outcome.

F. Werthham.

Golden Age Stories

The world doesn't look like four colors printed on cheap pulp paper – all the usual hues are there. Time passes at its normal rate, a few things ever seem to just snap back to the status quo as before – only to be repeated a few years down the line as the cosmic creator runs out of ideas.

There is a sense that this is a golden age, a feeling of wonder that may not last. With the recent launch of Sputnik a new sense of wonder prevails.



Dateline: Moscow – Already known for his grand departure from the former premier, the Soviet leader issues a new missive not only ending official discrimination against the “specially able” but indeed welcoming them into the Russian Heartland.

“I am always willing to admit mistakes... of my predecessor. And in this case, it was a great one. These people have the potential to carry the great revolution

...

[Announcer] Hello it is three O'clock and time for the science hour with Dr. J and Mr. H, brought to you by Luft Milk of Magnesia – when your stomach has got your down, let us luft you up!

[Dr. J] Hello, I'm Dr. J, broadcasting on XM-AN, frequency 883.

[Mr. H] and I'm Mr. H. Today we have a special guest – Dr. Braun here to talk about the latest developments in sputniks and rockets.

[Braun] Danke, it iz nice to be able to teach without working about what will blow up our launch pad next

[J] Yes, I heard about the vanguard – but at least no one was hurt.

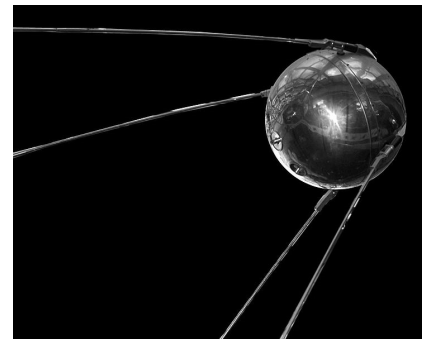
[H] The first question we have, and perhaps the most common one, what does sputnik have to do with these new, seemingly supernatural people, the so called comics?

[B] Nothing at all, so far as we can tell Ze Russian satellite is but a transmitter and standard radio frequencies. It is merely the fallacy of equating temporal proximity of the two events.

[J] Yes, but the Van Allen Belts...

[B] Neine, if anything, they should prevent such, oddities. I am but a rocket scientist, and it would take someone far more intelligent to discern what is causing this phenomenon.

[H] Ah, well. On to our next letter, from a Mrs. kitty living in...



“Mr Keeton, what of these rumors that there is some sort of organization dedicated to arresting the so-called comics?”

“Please, what kind of silly question is that? There are organizations across the land – to help farmers with a draught or flood, to protect the youth from mary-ju-wana, and to keep the Reds on their side of the iron curtain. As a matter of public safety, such an organization would simply have to exist.”

“But these are people who are trying to up hold the law, and doing a fine job of it I might add.”

“Whose law are they upholding? In America, arrests require warrants, and the presence of trained officers. Discipline, restraint, the public good - you don’t see the local constable throwing about cars! These ... comics, have no authority from congress, its simply what they take for themselves!”

“But sure no number of uniformed police could catch hold up a sinking ocean liner like Megaton.”

“Al Capone thought he was providing a necessary service, and a desired commodity. Some people did get rich or drunk, and Capone acted like he had his own super ability to do whatever he wanted to whomever he wanted. Does his good intentions excuse the dozens of murders? You know what they say about the road to hell and how its paved. But even a man like Capone can be caught on tax evasion. How do you suggest stopping the likes of a man who flies and juggles automotives?”

“I can’t tell you my name of course, but I can say I served in the war. When you did something impressive then, you felt the rush of adrenaline, the pounding of your heart.

But as a Comic, as you’ve taken to call us, there is none of that. No stress, no excitement. It just feels... right. Like a dolphin finding the sea for the first time, or a deaf man learning to hear a symphony.

Everything slows down, you can see exactly where to step, just what to push. And then its over, and life just rushes back to full speed, you realize you weren’t really seeing or hearing anything. No world but what is in front of you and what you want it to be.

... leading to a harrowing conclusion. True to whatever form, Burroughs can claim to have and highly recommended for those with a stomach for the macabre.

8. Speaking of a New Morality by Professor N. Zaratuhsa. 336 pages, B-Cave books, c. 1958

I am unfortunately quite unfamiliar with the academic works of the professor, which is unfortunate. Though it seems to be quite popular with the scholarly crowd, I can’t help but feel that I’m missing half the story by not being a philosophy student.

Furthermore, it’s the good half that I’m missing.

The back cover claims it is about an “ubermench” who rejects the standing social order after waking up one day with insect like abilities. Apparently this is a chance to be a man in doing, rather than a person in being. However, he doesn’t so much become a better person than raving and ranting individual that would make Marx look like a silent nobody.

Tortured German aside, it seems more like an attempt to capitalize on the recent “Squids” phenomena without doing anything more than repeating “Power allows the choice needed to create a new world, choice grants the power to make change”.

Only recommended for those who have spent more than six years in college or those who think pulp fiction can come true.

9. Windows Vista by B. Gates 250 pages, Soft Publishing Inc. C. 1957

This tale of betrayal begins in Seattle...

Training an Agent

Step One: Background

Operatives chosen for the agency have a couple of things in common. First of all, they're normal people – this isn't a case of attempting to fight fire with fire. Secondly, they tend to have police or government backgrounds – though there is still a place for scientists and mechanics in the investigative branch as well.

Perhaps the most unique attribute of the agents is that they have all experienced the "Squids" first hand. Perhaps they have a relative displaying unusual powers. Maybe they survived a disaster brought on by someone abusing their new ability to bend reality. Whatever it is, some of it seems to have rubbed off on them, and they can go the extra mile when called upon.

Think of a background for the character. A name, age, and hometown are a must. What do they think of the Squids?

Step Two: The Folio

Agents are defined by the first three prime numbers – five attributes, three skills, and two areas of expertise. Each of these is rated from 1-9, with five being the average from a normal person.

Attributes are statistics describing

Strength: A rough measure of the agent's gross physical abilities – how much they can lift, how fast they run.

Understanding: This represents the person's ability to make logical connections and to apply knowledge to the situation.

Perception: Awareness of the world, reading expressions, finding clues.

Endurance: Agents expect to get into some rough situations, and it's their stamina that pulls them through.

Reflexes: Reaction time and dexterity, this is the attribute for acting quickly or precisely.

Each attribute begins at four, and the agent has six points to distribute amongst these ratings. Points may be withdrawn from one rating to raise another further, if one does not mind a crippling weakness in one area in exchange for excess talent in another.

A character can comfortably carry 10 kilos/20 lbs per point of strength, and run a number of meters/yards equal to the rating in ten seconds.

Step Three: Expertise and Skills

Expertise is what defines an agent's character or desires. An ace pilot from the war might have obtained such honors because he always loved the sky and has Piloting as an Expertise. He might also be defined with Etiquette, as he was always a polite Southern gentleman, even after the rigors of boot camp. A character has two such areas, which begin rated at three, and have four points to distribute in addition.

Skills are areas of study where the agent shows notable aptitude. Not quite as central to their concept of the world, but still valuable for interacting with it. Each of their three skills begins with a level of three like Expertise, but has six points to increase them, like attributes.

Sample Skills

Driving	Animal Handling
Repair	Automatic Weaponry
Disguise	Chemistry
Medicine	Climbing
Research	Etiquette
Tracking	Forensics
Brawling	Pistol Handling
Piloting	Rifle Marksmanship
Swimming	Sailing
Negotiation	Writing

While Shift will be dealt with in greater detail later, for now you need to know that all of these attributes can be increased temporarily – but skills easier than attributes, and expertise easier than skills.

Step Four: Rank, Shift, and Equipment

All agents begin with a rank of Officer, five shift out of a maximum of ten, and a standard kit becoming of a police officer – uniform, badge, .38 revolver, access to a car with built in radio, and restraints.

Example Character Creation

Step One: Mort Fingerhut began was a flight surgeon during the Second World War. With a heart for medicine, and a head for science, he decided to join the new government agency to learn more about the rise of “Comics” and as to if this might have any way of improving the health of the common man. As of yet, he is unmarried, though he has two brothers and a recently married sister living in Chicago. For the time being at least, he sees little wrong with any particular super powered individual, but the damage their conflicts often insight is worrisome.

Step Two: What kind of abilities might he have? Well, he made it through army air corps training, so we will raise his strength a point. As a doctor, we can expect him to be observant and knowledgeable so we will put two points into each of those attributes. As a surgeon, he should be able to react to emergencies on the table and so the last point goes into Reflexes

Aptitude Rankings

	Start	Add	Result
Strength	4	1	5
Understanding	4	2	6
Perception	4	2	6
Endurance	4	0	4
Reflexes	4	1	5

Step Three: Now on to the question of what abilities define the character. Given our vision of a pre-eminent doctor, medicine comes to the forefront. As a man of science, and one who would be attempting to learn of new drugs, chemistry also seems to be a desirable attribute.

Each begins at a rating of three, but we think he is more the surgeon than the lab rat. So Medicine

receives three of the extra points, and Chemistry only one.

Areas of Expertise

	Start	Add	Result
Medicine	3	3	6
Chemistry	3	1	4

Now to decide what other skills go along with these main definitions. Looking through medical journals and contributing to them see to be prominent features of a doctor. A little more thought brings up the conclusion that a doctor can afford a car, and would likely to have experience with ambulances. For simplicity, the discretionary points are evenly divided.

Skills

	Start	Add	Result
Research	3	2	5
Writing	3	2	5
Driving	3	2	5

Step Four: Now to finish up with some simple bookkeeping. As he is new to the agency, Agent Fingerhut is just an officer, with basic equipment, 5 starting shift, and a maximum of ten.

Shift	Current	Maximum
	5	10



In the Cards

The Draw

A basic test is made by drawing a card from the full 54-card deck, comparing its value to the attribute of skill being tested. If the face value is less than or equal to the attribute or skill in question, then the check is a success, if not the attempt fails.

Drawing a joker means a long-term complication has arisen from this incident. Perhaps the squid in question has taken a shine to you and keeps attempting to recruit your agent as a sidekick.

Black face cards indicate a worse than normal failure – one that may break equipment or put someone in greater than usual danger.

Side Note: Yes, most people are rated from 1-10 in a scale that goes up to 13. These are normal humans attempting to deal with those who are quite clearly not.

Shift Points

Whether due to intense training, or latent abilities, agents are able to increase their luck temporarily. Shift points spent before their draw effectively raise the attribute or skill in question. They may raise the ability as high as queen, but this does not rule out the chance of drawing a joker, nor absolutely guarantee success.

Boosting an attribute costs two points for the first increase, and the cost doubles from there. For example, going from strength four to strength six costs six points – 2 for the first increase, four for the second.

Skills, being more focused, are easier to boost, costing one point for the first increase, and doubling there after. So moving from a skill range of three to six would be $1+2+4 = 7$ points.

A character's defining expertise only costs one point per level of boost. A surgeon with a medical expertise of six, could raise his skill to ten for just the cost of four points.

The average person tends to either lack this ability entirely, or has three to five points as a maximum.

Gaining and Losing Shift

The amount of shift available fluctuates. The baseline for any given day is about half of their maximum.

Shift is restored when someone rises to the challenge. If the other players think that the risk was great or the description of the action especially good, they may say so, and if the Illustrator agrees, the player receives a new point. If any points were spent during the attempt – they are returned, in addition to the bonus.

However, shift wasted is not restored. Using it when someone's life is not on the line, or in a stale way, even there is mortal danger, simply expends the points. If an agent's shift is reduced to zero, they can gain no more until they take a sabbatical. A good night's rest will restore two or three points, a true vacation will bring it up to 50% of the maximum.

Adjusting Difficulty

Generally speaking, one's skill is the level they can achieve under normal conditions. Should the situation be especially stressful, the Illustrator may reduce the effective skill by one or two points. Conversely, if the situation is notably simple, or the agent has adequate time to prepare, a draw shouldn't be necessary, and the game may continue. These are competent agents, after all.

Good description and careful planning also affect difficulty. Simple descriptions add no bonus, earn no points, and repeating the same one, will result in a penalty.

In a fight, attempting to punch the criminal isn't too exciting. Say the same thing again, and they're probably expecting the beating, and thus are harder to hit.

Out of uniform, Expertise abilities take a minus one penalty – Perhaps it's the confidence a suit and badge provides, but unprepared and unofficially, agents just don't do as well.

Advancement

The HEROS agency is a meritocracy, and those who do well will advance in rank. Each rank increases the maximum number of shift points available by five. Certain ranks are also indicative of increased ability as well.



Title	Increase
Officer	Starting Rank
Field Agent	+1 skill point
Sergeant	+1 to a attribute
Lieutenant	+1 Expertise
Captain	+2 skill points
Major	+1 to an attribute
Inspector	+2 Expertise points
Commissioner	+3 skill points
Chief	+2 attribute points
Director	+3 Expertise points

Promotions are earned based on completing missions and acting in an exemplary fashion (in other words – earning shift points)

Each time the number of shift points reaches its maximum, make a note of it.

At the end of each mission, draw a card. If the result is six or less, you advance in rank. You may draw an additional card if the mission was a success, and per each time you achieved maximum shift.

A player may chose to spend less than all of their checks in hope of making the grade now, and have a better chance next time. However, they may not make the draw, and then spend a point to try again – the character must complete another mission.

The Armory

For all intensive purposes, HEROS is a mirror of the FBI. Its agents have limited police authority, and access to vast government resources.

Most officers under the rank of Lieutenant wouldn't really know that however. To most people they're just another person in a trench coat and fedora, like an extra on "The Untouchables".

Like most police officers, standard issue is .38 revolvers, and like most, that is all they are likely to get. War surplus weapons like M1 Thompson Submachine-guns, M1911A1 Colt Pistols and Browning Automatic Rifles can be checked out with proper paperwork and if returned after use.

For game purposes, automatic weapons grant no extra damage or accuracy, but allow an agent to strike up to five adjacent targets provided there are no bystanders near – no loyal agent would endanger the public with spraying bullets.

Rank has its privileges, and the higher up an officer, the more likely they are to use technology the ordinary man would find unusual. They can sign out time with the computers for searching records, or borrow high-powered personal radios that can contact normal phones and fit in a hip pocket. Some of the cars are even equipped with mobile data banks that play out notes on a green phosphor screen.

The catch with these advanced technologies is that they are quite unreliable – and require spending a point of shift each time they're used to work properly.

In a similar vein, there are some advanced so-called "ray guns" that appear to have extra affect on Comics. These are only for higher ranked agents, and eat shift with each firing as if it was ammunition. Such weapons get two draws against the reflex attribute, acting as two shots taken at once.

Combat

Determining Order

Combat is handled much like any other skill draws, though it is taken in a specific sequence, and can have quite unfortunate outcomes. A single round of conflict lasts about ten seconds.

The first step is for normal humans, including agents, to declare their actions.

Then a card is drawn and its numerical value added to their Reflex attribute. (Ace =1, J=11, Q=12, K=13 – this is amongst the only times drawing high or a face card can be considered beneficial.) The highest total gets to act first. A tie is broken with a second draw to see which of them goes before the other. (But still in the same place amongst the rest of the pack) Shift may be spent before the draw to boost the number.

Comics, with a greater sense of dramatic timing, get to declare their action after the draw when they know the order of events.

Once the cue is established, each person takes one of the following actions on their turn. A Point of shift may be spent to cancel your action and defend against someone who is going first – otherwise, the action is resolved with the normal draw.

Actions

Run in a straight line equal to strength and attempt an action at a minus four penalty
Fire a weapon
Attempt a physical attack
Dodge, weave, and roll through cover, while moving a number of meters equal to strength and imposing a -4 penalty to ham you.
Start a car, write a short message, etc.

Talking or shouting warnings to other agents doesn't count against your ability to act, though obviously G-men can't call time out and huddle for strategy... unless they're playing football.

Injury

Any time an attack connects, draw against Endurance. If the result is a success, then attack is merely a setback, and imposes a small penalty to the next action. If not, then remove one point of endurance. When the endurance attribute reaches zero, the character is unconscious.

Surprisingly few people will continue the attack after the agent is unconscious. It may be due to the prevailing drama gestalt, or it may be because the director of the HEROS organization has authority to use anything short of the A-bomb, and killing an agent would not get on his good side.

Combat Example

Agent Fingerhut, the doctor from the character example, is attempting to restrain an unruly patient.

Mort declares that his is going to grab the patient's arm, while one in the gown claims they will run down the hall and dive under a gurney. Drawing for order, the agent gets a 7, plus reflex 5 for a total of 12, the other draws a King, which would be 13 even without a reflex of six.

With the target out of grasp, Mort tries a more creative approach. "This time I'm going to leap onto the attendants chair, roll it down the hall, then bounce off the wall and come down on top of him!" The illustrator grants a +2 bonus for this thematic idea, and mort spends two shift to add to his initiative.

Meanwhile, the patient offers the unoriginal option of running.

Draws this time favor mort with a total of $5+6+2 = 12$ versus $6+3 = 9$. Drawing against reflex for fast actions mort needs a 7 or less, and draws the ace (1). The attack connects. The defender draws against an endurance of four, and finds a ten – the strike has full effect, endurance minus one.

Since the patient is just a six year old trying to avoid a polio inoculation, the Illustrator rules that the fight can end now, rather than beating the poor child senseless.

Squids

Attributes

Comics have the same attributes as normal people – but to a higher degree. Such individuals have 10 points to initially distribute – and their maximum is Jack (effectively 11 out of 13).

They still have only three skills, but once again, more points are available to boost the initial values. They begin with four in each skill, and seven points to allot.

Like agents, Squids have shift. A weak specimen Begins with 15 points maximum, and gains three per level per level of advancement.

Powers

The powers of a Comic work in much the same way as an agent's Expertise. In fact, they can be seen as simply a far more broadly applicable version.

Each power has a beginning level of 4, and the Comic has four additional points to improve these at first level.

The limitation of a power is more defined by the description and inventiveness of its user, than by the limits of knowledge.

For example, a comic might have the ability to create ice. Simply claiming, "I create some ice" is probably going to result in a handful of half-melted cubes, and no adjustment in difficulty (or if anything, making the feat harder.) On the other hand, describing how blue pillars suddenly explode out of the rivers surface, while blue snow swirls about forming an arch as icicles leap across the gaps in a truss pattern is going to be far more likely to produce results.

Shift points may boost a power, just like with expertise – a one for one spend to increase.

Special Draws

Rather than simply boosting their already high abilities, shift may be spent to draw additional cards instead. Each card acts like a separate action, but is taken at the same time. Hence three strength actions taken during a fight would be akin to making three attempts to punch someone in the same round of the fight.

Like boosting attributes, it costs two points for the first increase, and the cost doubles thereafter.

More impressively, since Squids have superior reaction time to normal people, all of these draws don't have to be the same action. However, every switch in target carries a fee of one point, and changing intent costs two. Defending against three opponents would cost eight points – one free action, two for the second, four for the third, and one point for each opponent after the first. To defend twice and attack once would be same multi-action cost (six) plus one for the extra defense, and two for the switch to attack – total nine.

Corruption

So far as anyone can tell, all of the Squids are human. As such, they are quite prone to the greed and self-advancement, just like normal people.

According to Nietzsche, the Ubermensch is someone who rejects normal morality, and works towards a greater goal without caring for others trying to hold him back. But what if no one can hold you back in the first place?

Squids already have greater abilities – spending shift to improve them is often just greedy and power hungry. Whenever a comic spends points to boost abilities – the illustrator should secretly draw against the number of points spent. If the draw is less than what is spent, make a note. At three such digressions, the squid may begin acting a bit differently. At five, their personality is taking a turn for the worse, but it is only at ten that they are truly gone. A Joker during one of these corruption draws indicates a temporary bout of insanity – a rather destructive fugue state no less. Repenting afterwards can be quite difficult, and usually requires self-imposed limitations to below even normal ability

Secrecy

Despite the complications that ensue, almost every Comic is inclined to hide their identity. It seems to be part of the drama gestalt. Attempting actions without a disguise (aside from the ramifications of revealing who they are) comes at minus one to the draw, for skills and attributes, while power use is at minus three. Powers simply don't work that well without a costume.

Very Important People

Director “Normal” Keeton

Head of the HEROS organization, Keeton has a unique task at hand. His former work hunting (and being hunted by) gangsters during the prohibition, and chasing German agents during the war seems almost relaxing compared to his current assignment. What do you do about a group of potentially unstable people who willfully break the law in the name of the law, while hiding their identities and receiving the adoration of the public? And what if one of them is your twin brother?

The other agents have taken to calling him by the nickname normal to calm his nerves, while Keeton himself has taken to tobacco with a zeal even 1950s doctors question. Yet this chain-smoking man in an immaculate pinstripe suit can pull off some amazing feats when the moment is right.

Aptitude Rankings

S	5
U	8
P	8
E	5
R	6

Areas of Expertise

Forensics	7
Tracking	6

Skills of Note

Negotiation	8
Driving	6
Pistol	7

Shift	Current	Maximum
	38	55

As Director of Hero, he has the resources to rival J. Edgar Hoover himself, at his browns stained fingertips, and an impressive folio amassed through years of service.

Megaton

“The radiant Atomic Avenger once again foils a plot the twisted Professor Platipodes!”

One of the first, and still arguably the greatest Comic to appear, Megaton is very much the icon of what one of these new powered individuals might be. With a blue mask, a soft accent, and a desire for justice, he seems to represent the something everyone can appreciate.

However, his abilities which allow him to walk through solid steel one moment and smash it to bits the next – though never turned on another person at full strength – also exemplify the amazing threat the Squids can pose.

Aptitude Rankings

S	10
U	5
P	6
E	7
R	6

Powers

Strong Force Manipulation	J
Magnetic Levitation Flight	7

Skills of Note

Brawling	J
Disguise	6
Repair	8

Shift	Current	Maximum
	30	42

Professor Platapodes

Can there be light without shadow? Is there a cosmic balance that must be battled over forever? Does whatever force that grants these great powers have a sense of humor?

Platapodes is very much Megaton's opposite – both spiritually – such as his tendency towards greed - and in physical ways like his obnoxious reedy voice. Everything he does seems to be a disorganized jumble, and that his fiendish inventions work at all is a wonder. In fact, only comics or agents have the slightest chance of getting them to work – which may be for the best since no one wants petty thugs with shrink rays.

Aptitude Rankings

S	5
U	6
P	5
E	8
R	6

Powers

Electro-location	6
Paralyzing Pain Venom	6

Skills of Note

Chemistry	7
Swimming	7
Brawling	5

Shift	Current	Maximum
	6	12

Comrade Baltic

America by no means has a monopoly on the presence of comics. But what would those godless commies do if they could control someone with powers not of this world?

As this former submariner shows, not much. He refuses to blindly praise the party, or adorn his costume with red and gold symbols – instead preferring a muted outline of a beluga whale. Nor does he show up for photo opportunities in the collective farms. In fact, he is more likely to abuse the system for pay-offs than many capitalist Comics.

Given the rushed quality displayed by many of the submarines coming off the north fleet slipways, having someone who can dive to great depths and float the hulk with ice is all the more necessary. Hence the authorities willfully look the other way they wont get a crusader for “Propaganda, Show Trials, and the Stalinist way!”

Aptitude Rankings

S	8
U	4
P	6
E	8
R	4

Powers

Freezing Atmosphere Control	8
Pressure Resistance	4

Skills of Note

Sailing	6
Tracking	6
Marksmanship	6

Shift	Current	Maximum
	6	12

In this Issue...

The Briefing

Its only ten a.m., and there are already a dozen cigarette butts in the director's ashtray. Like the voice of god issuing from a halo of smoke, the morning briefing rolls on.

"Last night there was an explosion at a marina, not thirty miles from here. So much fuel burned up that some of the local residents were calling civil defense to report the Russians launched a atom bomb. Fortunately, that is not the case.

A submarine was reported in the area. US destroyers chased it off of course. Just one of the new "Juliet" types showing the flag, but some the reports say it dropped something overboard before the surface vessels got there. SONAR didn't find anything, but I'm willing to believe that the two events are related.

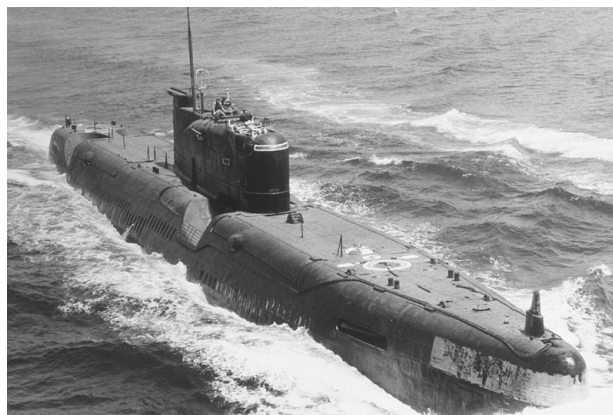
This could very well be a test – of how to infiltrate a nation with Squids. Hit a insignificant target, gauge the reaction, test the recovery systems. Military comics could be the biggest threat since guided missiles and the hydrogen... err never mind. Forget that last bit and get to work. Take the new guy with you as well."

Notes

Keeton may be stressed, but he isn't so paranoid to think everything can be blamed on the Reds or the Squids without good reason.

In fact, the act does appear to be sabotage, with remains of a demolition charge that failed to go off being found at the scene. Its composition of RDX, however, is one more commonly used by the US military rather than the Soviet one. Still, this doesn't rule out the devious KGB, nor the involvement a Squid – as most of them can't simply make things explode either.

Still, sending a brand new submarine thousands of miles, to blow up a couple of yachts and fishing boats seems amiss.



Of course, if it's not the Reds, then who is it, and what is the unrelated incident about the nearby missile submarine about?

Possibilities include some sort of domestic dispute that has gotten out of hand – between a jealous husband with an alter ego and a rich man with old boot legging connections. Or perhaps it's a classic KGB counter-intelligence operation against a defector living the good life in cape cod.



Illustrator's Notes

Warning – this section may not be appropriate for players to read!

Telling Fun Stories

The essence of golden age comics is often summed up as escapism. The idea of easily defined good and evil, with one being able to triumph monthly. Generally speaking, they don't take into account the ramifications of how everything changes.

Now making a full list of such oddities would be well beyond the time constraints of this document, however, we can mind a few things. It would be very scary to live in a world where there are villains no military or police can defeat. Even the stable laws of physics don't hold when people can disobey thermodynamics at will to throw energy bolts.

However, the "heroes" have no oversight, only hopefully good intentions. Still, can you really arrest a bunch of tied up people dropped on the steps of the courthouse with no explanation of how it got there? And if a comic picks up the money, then they are tampering with evidence – something that could get them arrested, and a release due to mistrial for the robbers. If the person can easily shatter concrete with their fists, wouldn't simply punching a criminal be considered assault with a deadly weapon?

Just because we are deconstructing the genre, doesn't mean you need to destroy it. The various agents are as much pulp-heroes as the "Comics" are super heroes. The point is not about that's impossible, but rather, if that happens, then what?

More Equipment

There are some, unusual devices available for combating Squids, but they carry a catch. Ray guns (LASER won't be coined for some time) hand-held wireless phones, and car mounted data terminals all require spending shift with each use. Most agents are under the impression that this is because it simply takes a bit of luck to get such experimental devices to work.

Actually, they run on the same collective unconscious as what grants the Comics their abilities. Only Keeton and a few of his most trusted officers are aware of this, and do their best to make sure no one learns of this. He doesn't want to reveal that the agency is almost entirely staffed by the kind of people they're supposed to be hunting.

That said, "non-sequitor" equipment that would not seem out of place in the year 2000 is available, but few and far between.

Its 1958 Guys

The Interstate highways of America are still under construction, and only VIPs and military officers are likely to travel in jet aircraft. Computers still mostly rely on punch cards and are the realm of a few ministries, universities, and large corporations since they are house-sized monstrosities. Some places in the US are still without electricity, Phone service over long distances is expensive, and sending letters via the post office is still quite common. DARPA won't be starting a network for years, and even longer before that is the Internet.

China and Russia still appear to be a monolithic communist block, though only the later have the bomb. On a clear day in Vegas, you can see the mushroom cloud of the latest nuclear test. Vietnam and Afghanistan haven't marred the reputations of the super-power's respective militaries – making a conventional invasion of Europe still seem possible.

Rockets are the hot new thing, and fins are beginning to appear on cars to cash in on the trend. Despite the supposed missile gap (which will actually favor the US for the next 30 years, not that rationality has anything to do with it) there is a sense of optimism.

The Contagion

One of the secrets not revealed to the public, is the Comic phenomenon spreads! It seems that those who are close to a comic become part of its story. A woman rescued by a hero is likely to be rescued again at some point – often by the same individual.

Agents are quite susceptible to this. Indeed, their "Expertise" can be seen as very narrowly defined powers.

It may be possible for agents to become their own quarry. For now, this possibility is simply defined as within the Illustrator's authority. Perhaps in an addition (Beyond Good and Super Villainy?)

As you may notice from the NPCs – an agent may have more shift than some Squids. Expertise out of uniform is decrease just like how super powers don't work without a costume. This is intentional, and observant players may get the hint.

Does this mean that agents can get powers or the multi-action abilities of a Comic? What about the risk of corruption?

It's a definite...

Maybe.

Agent Registry

Registration Number:

____/____/____/____

Name:

D.o.B

____/____/19____

Residence

City_____ State_____

Zip_____

Last Year of Education:

(circle)

HS/BA/BS/PhD/GED/Other

Background History

Rank

--

Authorized Equipment

For Official Use Only

Agent ID

Photo:

	Fnord

Hair

Eyes

Height

Weight

Do not write in this space

Aptitude Rankings

S	
U	
P	
E	
R	

Areas of Expertise

Skills of Note

Shift	Current	Maximum

Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?