

# ISSUE 51

## PREVIOUSLY IN *MYSTERY MEN*

### **Shojo Shaman and the B.A.C.K.U.P.S.**

As the televisions on display in the storefront window cut to a commercial, having just finished Channel 5's Supers related news segment, Shojo Shaman, having paused to watch, turned and continued on her way, still limping slightly after her tussle with the Morbid Masons, who had managed to knock a wall down on top of her during the fight . A short way behind her, the sound of four pairs of feet and the rattle of one loose shopping cart wheel also resumed. As she went, she yanked out her cell phone, dialed furiously, and waited for the person on the other end of the line to pick up. As soon as they did, she started in on them.

“Witless Wonders? Witless Wonders??? Really? REALLY? I mean, come on, Linda. Even if we're not teammates anymore, I thought we were still friends! I guess now I know what it's like to be on the receiving end of Bad Press' Negative Newscast Knockout. .... Okay. Okay. I know you didn't make it up, it was the Trumpet. .... Yeah, I know. We did foul that one up pretty bad. But it still hurts, to hear that kind of thing, you know?” With a sigh, she added, “It'd probably hurt less if it was also less true.

“Look, I know you're busy with the news and all, so I'll let you go. Just needed to get that off my chest ... Yes, we definitely should. Lunch on Saturday? Sound great! Barring, you know, apocalypse or super crime or rains of exploding rotten fish. Boy, do I hope that never happens. Again. Anyway, look forward to seeing you. Bye.”

From behind her, the sounds of footsteps and the rattling of the shopping cart wheel drew closer. “Yo, Sho, hold up a mo'!”

Shojo Shaman turned and gave Graffiti Guru a glare. “”Sho?”” she repeated, indignantly.

The young man in a tie-died t-shirt with the letters 'GG' spray-painted on the front, a pair of paint stained jeans, and ball cap pulled low to cast his face in shadow merely grinned back at her. Shojo through up her hands with a sigh. “Whatever. What is it, Graffiti Guru?”

He gestured to where a grandmotherly old lady was pulling a crumpled up newspaper from her shopping cart full of junk and was attempting to smooth it out. “Bag Lady's been showing us the headlines,” he said, “There's loads going down in the city! We've got to do our part. You need to give us our assignments, since you have the most experience with this sort of thing, not to mention being the team leader...”

“No!” snapped Shojo. “No more teams! I'm sick of teams. Teams are all fun and teamwork and comraderie, luring you in, making you feel wanted, and part of something, and then Bam! They leave you. They're always leaving you. Like boyfriends. And mothers.” She blinked a

few times, cleared her throat. “Urm. I may have some abandonment issues, there. But that doesn’t change the fact that I never agreed to be on your team. “

“Actually, ma’am, you’re not on our team, we’re on yours,” said the tall but slightly over-weight and out of shape fellow in a security guard uniform carrying a giant flashlight. “We had a vote and worked it out all nice and democratic-like.”

“I never got a vote,” retorted Shojo Shaman.

“Well, actually you did,” said the small chicken perched on the handlebar of the shopping cart, in a high pitched somewhat shrill voice. “In fact, since we’re only beginners, and you the veteran hero, we gave you three votes to our one a piece. You seemed to be somewhat set against the idea, whenever we tried to approach you about it before, so we cast your votes as such. But, in the end, it came out four to three in favor of us all being a team and you the leader. With my prophetic superpowers I foresaw your objections, so I demanded a recount, on your behalf, just to make sure everything was fair and above board. But, no matter how many times we counted, it always came out the same.

Bag Lady chimed in, “Besides, child, it’s too late now. We’ve already submitted the paperwork and paid the registration fee. Everything is all squared away, proper and legal, with the old Federal Reserve Over Watch Network. If we tried to back out of it now, there’s a decommissioning and de-enrollment fee, and that would be a terrible waste of money.”

Shojo Shaman gave a puzzled look, animated wavy lines of confusion radiating from her head. “But... there’s no fee to be a superhero team, you just... wait, the Federal Reserve Over... you mean FROWN? You REGISTERED us with FROWN???? But... that whole thing was a trick by the evil robot duplicate mayor to get info on all the heroes! We took care of that! How is that agency even still around? You actually registered us? And gave them money?” She buried her face in her hands. “Ohhhh. We really are the Witless Wonders, aren’t we?”

After a moment or two, Shojo raised her head and looked her fate square in the eyes. “Alright,” she said, “I give. Apparently I can’t stop you from following me around, registering me with defunct evil government organizations, or making me your leader. So we’ll give the team thing one more try.”

All four of the others beamed happily at her, clearly quite pleased, and despite herself she felt her heart warm a little towards them. After all, they weren’t bad guys... just beginners. Even she’d been a beginner once, though it seemed like a long time ago, now. “Okay, show me that paper. What’s going on out there?” She moved over to the shopping cart and perused the news over Bag Lady’s shoulder.

“So what’s our mission, Sho’?” asked Graffiti Guru after a moment.

Shojo shook her head. “Stop calling me that. And there’s too much going on for us to just go after one of these. And some of us should patrol, as well. If you ignore the streets for the big ticket items, well, sooner or later it comes back to bite you in the butt. Usually sooner. So I

think we're going to have to try something different than your usual strategy of stalking me until I get mugged by goons.

"Now, Chicken Little, I think you've got a vested interest in seeing this Hamfist guy go down. Gotta take a stand for chicken kind. And maybe Man Eating Cow will go too, and give you hand.

"Flash, you've got a background in security work, right? So signing up to help against the diamond heists is right up your alley.

"Graffiti, I think those Blue Bloods need few more colors in their lives, and you are just the hero to cover their blues with rainbow hues.

"Bag Lady, you're our presence on patrol, this time around. Why not start with your home turf... there's always crime to be found in the slums.

"And me, I'll go help with the Lunabomber thing. Can't have the moon getting blown up again." She touched a silver tiara in her hair which seemed to shine with silvery moonlight.

"Again?" asked Chicken Little, "But I saw it up there, just last night...?"

"Heroes fixed it, of course," said Shojo with a shrug. "It's held together with clothespins now."

"That Captain Clothes pins is a very nice young man," said Bag Lady approvingly.

"So that's the plan. Any questions?" asked Shojo. Everyone shook their heads. "Then, we're off!"

## **Super Squadron**

While in the stockroom of his Superdepartment store job, Chris Cringer, during one of his rare breaks, in astonishment saw a supernaturally glowing disembodied yet nonhuman head appear in the air above him, accompanied by theramin sound effects. The blue head was bald and wizened, and wore a red cap trimmed with white fur.



Like a silent, psychic shout, the words of the immensely old, immensely potent brain rang across the light-centuries of timespace directly into Chris' own. "Santa of Space Sector 2814! The Guardians of the Christmasverse have need of you! Use your all- powerful magic ring to fly immediately to the Great Attractor beyond the Virgo Cluster of Galaxies! We have learned the GALACTIPHAGUS, the eater of Galaxies, is planning to ruin Christmas by eating all the galaxies in your cluster!"

"I'd be happy to comply, but I do not exactly have a magic ring, O Guardian."

"Foolish youth! Abin Santa should have told you how to operate the Omnihedron of Anti-Time which is at the center of your Fortress of Santatude now assigned to you! The Omnihedron will lead you to the ring, which was placed near the Big Bang for safekeeping."

"Great! Where is this fortress of Solitude?"

"Santatude. At the North Pole."

"Er... that is hard for me to get to."

"... Of the planet Neptune."

"Er... even harder. We earthmen do not have space ships that can reach there."

"Nonsense! Our records show that the super scientists of the late Neolithic Dinosaur Men of Lemuria have such vessels, as do four of the five civilizations of mole creatures living in the core of the earth, as well as the major civilizations covering seven tenths of the Earth's surface who can talk to fish. This is EARTH, we are talking about, right? Third planet of Sol? The only planet in the Milky Way where all the parallel timelines of alternate realities happen to converge? The one with the Moon that is about to be blown up? According to our records, the ONLY earth-dwelling species that does not have spaceships are a group of primitive and superstitious goons so stupid that they live on the surface of the planet, not under the ocean or under the crust where it is safe. It is as if they don't know the moon is about to explode. What doofuses. "

"Um..."

"According to our records, you are ruled by loving and peaceful council of shapechanging vampire mummy robots known as the Draculocons buried under the pyramids of Egypt, who are actually Martians in their pyramid forms, hibernating. The pyramids are Martians, I mean, not the mummies. Your leader, Professor Menace, made radio contact by means of faster than light hyperwave with our station on Alpha Centauri, and we put our most trusted agent, Agent Sinister von Grinch, in charge of giving him every thing he needed to quell the rebellions on his Earth planet. He told us it belonged to him."

"The records may be less than perfectly accurate, O Guardian. I think Professor Menace is some sort of supervillain who keeps his brain in a jar, or keeps a jar in his brain, or something. And ..."

"What a moment — you are Santa that picked up his commission off of Abin Santa's corpse? While he was delirious? Which of the surface dwelling races are you a member of? Homo Magicus, who can cast spells by talking backward? Homo Neanderthal, who have immense psychic powers and can walk through dreams to other planes of existence? Or Homo Superior, whose mutant genetic superiorities allow them to control matter and energy?"

"None of the above. Is there another choice?"

"Only the race we call Homo Doofus."

"Um..."

"Look, maybe stopping Galactiphagus is too steep for you right now, at your level of cosmic evolutionary yokelness, youth. Why not try taking out a few purse-snatchers or street thugs with your Homo Doofus powers and abilities, whatever they are, and then we'll talk more? Hanging up now..."

"What was that about the Moon blowing up? Hello? Hello? And how do you hang up a brain?"

Chris Cringer, punching his fist into the palm of his other hand, said to his Talking Reindeer, Adolph of Exposition. "Adolph! If the Moon is blown up, that will end all life on Earth, and stop Christmas from Coming! I must stop Christmas from being stopped from coming! But how?"

"Quickly, my red-nosed chum! To the Sleigh-mobile!"



Later that Night, after changing into his Super Santa Suit and trying to climb down the chimney of District Attorney Scanlon, getting stuck and getting arrested, and spending the evening in the drunk tank, Supermarket Santa was once more consulting his good friend Adolph the Talking Reindeer. Adolph had thrown a coat over his back, and purchased a latex mask from a Halloween Shop, and convinced the guards he was Santa's lawyer. The deer had some trouble getting his mouth to the telephone to talk to the prisoner through the glass.

"Der Goot News, mine friend," said Adolph in his outrageous comic-opera Prussian accent, "Iss Zat the Dizricht Attorney ---"

"Okay, okay, stop. Just stop. Why don't I just IMAGINE you have a really thick Prussian accent, and you spell all your words normally. Okay?"

"Can I throw in a few words like Achtung! And Jah! So people still think I have a Prussian accent?"

"Sure. Whatever. Compared to that blue guy in the hat, this is normal."

"The District Attorney says he'll drop all charges if you do him a favor. He knows some other Superheroes and he is willing to help you. With the loss of Super Strategist, he thinks a vigilante committee of anonymous weirdoes with utterly useless powers is just the thing this city needs!"

"Just the thing needed to fight crime and keep the spirit of Christmas alive?"

"No, just the thing to distract the supervillains and organized crime gangs, so the police can have an easier job catching them. I've arranged to have everyone meet in the FORTRESS OF SANTATUDE at the North Pole ...."

"Um. That does not work for me. Remember? I don't actually have a magical flying sleigh just yet. I have a VW bug with a red nose and reindeer horns called the Sleigh-mobile. I can get to District Attorney Scanlon's house."

"Um, I mean, ACHTUNG! That is no good. Either he is afraid of revealing your secret identity, or he does not want a vigilante dressed like Santa near his house. We will need to find another secret headquarters for the team."

Just then, a large but otherwise inconspicuous barrel, which had been resting innocuously in the corner of the Prisoner's Visiting Room now tipped sideways, rolled inconspicuously up to the glass where Supermarket Santa was speaking to his disguised reindeer, and righted itself. A periscope and a microphone emerged from the barrel's bung hole.

An eerie echoing laugh issued from the barrel. "Who knows WHAT EVIL lurks in the barrels of men? BWA-hah-ha-ha-ha-hah! The Barrelman knows!"

Out of the barrel popped a mysterious figure in a hooded sweatshirt and billowing black cape, who with great agility, tripping over his cape only once, now hefted his mighty barrel over his head, flourishing it menacingly.

Binoculars, a stethoscope, an icepick, and one or two other things he kept in his utility barrel fell out of the open lid, clattering to the ground.

The other criminals in the area, being a cowardly and superstitious lot, were suddenly laughing with relief.

Supermarket Santa said, "Barrelman! I had thought you were a myth!"

"A myth to some! To others— a nightmare!!" intoned the mysterious figure. "I command the powers of all barrel-related powers! I can make this barrel stink like a pickle barrel! Or explode like a barrel of gunpowder! Or catch on fire like a barrel of tar! OBSERVE!"

Suddenly, to the astonishment of the guards and prisoners there, the barrel burst into flame.



Later, hands bandaged, Barrelman and Supermarket Santa shared the night in the cell and were released the next morning. "My barrel-cave is not yet ready," explained the dark cylindrical avenger of the night. "Perhaps we can meet at Moe's Pie Shop at the foot of Shadow Hill."

"The Haunted Pie Shop?" Exclaimed Supermarket Santa in surprise. "You mean that horrific Pie Shop in Shadow Hill where there were several pie and pastry related murders, reputed to be haunted, and where folks on moonless nights say that they can smell apple pies and cherry cobbler being baked — even when there is no pieman in the shop? You expect us to go into that sinister site of crusty cream filled horror?"

An echo of eerie laughter was his only answer; he turned, but Barrelman had vanished! Supermarket Santa leaned on the large cracker barrel sitting inconspicuously in the middle of the street, and looked left and right carefully, wondering where the Crimefighting Cask had disappeared to!

The next day, Supermarket Santa arrived at the Haunted Pie Shop to discover that it was overrun with Secret Service Agents and Papparazzi. Parked outside was a motorcade of limousines and motorcycles and armored cars, flying the Presidential Flag. Also, the world famous racecar Mock Mach Macht Schnell, driven by Go Mifune.

After being frisked by the Secret Service, Santa was escorted by a marine guard squad into the pie shop. All the other customers and staff had been cleared out. There, seated in a booth in the back, was James Norcross, the President of the United States! Next to him was the world famous race car driver, Go Mifune. They were exchanging autographs. Next to Go Mifune was a small boy in a baseball cap and overalls, and next to him was a monkey in a baseball cap and overalls.



"Hmm..." said Adolph the Talking Reindeer. "Compared to this, Santa Claus from Outer Space seems normal."

"Hush!" cautioned Santa. "I have had to put you in a baseball cap so that no one will recognize you as Adolph, the talking reindeer that belongs to Christopher Cringer, store employee."



"Mr. President, what are you doing here?" asked Santa.

President Norcross said cagily, "Nothing, oh, nothing. It is just that --- pardon me, boys, but could you give me a moment?"

Grumbling, the small army of Secret Servicemen and Marine Guards backed out of the store, leaving only a nondescript janitor with a broom behind, sweeping up.

President Norcross said, "I happen to have this — friend — who knows a guy with superpowers willing to aid the new group you are forming. We've focus group tested several names, and polls are leaning heavily toward, NORCROSSCARE as a name."

"Santa Squad and his Elves," said Adolph. "We will call it SANTA SQUAD AND HIS ELVES!"

Go Mifune said, "I also have a — friend — who is interested in stopping the illegal gambling and race fixing that is occurring in Tokyo. Perhaps he can join your team. I can, uh, lend him my car. And my clothes. And my voice. His name is Superevangelion Macross Appleseed Eighth-Man of Justice."

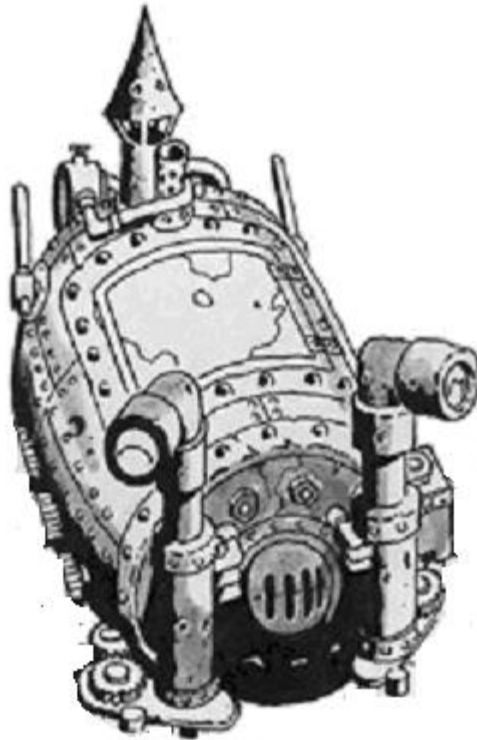
Norcross said, "Sorry, Mifune, everything ending with 'Of Justice' is taken. My friend the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court told me so. Your friend will have to go with 'Superhighwayman' or something!"

The little kid said, "That sounds like the name of a villain!"

Go Mifune shrugged. "I will surely tell him to change his hero name to FAST SPEEDSTER or SPEED FASTER."

Santa said, "I think it should have the word 'super' in it."

A low, eerie chuckle issued from the non-descript barrel sitting next to the pie counter. A pair of powerful twin periscopes issued from the bung hole.



Santa stood up suddenly, "Gentlemen, that is Barrelman. You see, my space powers allow me to tell when someone has been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake! I think we can trust him."

Go Mifune said, "Where did you meet him?"

Santa said, "In prison."

Go Mifune, "You met him in prison, he dresses as a barrel, and we can ... trust him?"

Santa nodded briskly. "So, President Norcross and Mr Mifune, what is the name of your two friends who will be joining me in fighting crime and saving Christmas?"

President Norcross said, "Well, you might not believe this, but I happen to know SUPER PRESIDENT!"

"You seem like such a mild mannered Commander in Chief, sir," offered Go Mifune. "How do you happen to know Super President?"

"He is Tony Stark's Bodyguard or something," said the President nervously, running his finger between his necktie and his neck. "We met at a fundraiser."

Go Mifune said, "Well, it just so happens that Super Speed Car Driver is in the bathroom here in this very pie shop. Except, uh, he's invisible. Until I go get him. Wait here."

A moment later, a mysterious figure dressed exactly like Go Mifune emerged from the back, stepping around the nondescript janitor with the broom and the large oblate rock he was sweeping in front of. The figure wore a white jacket, white pants, a scarf at the neck, and a helmet with a big red M on the brow, but with the visor lowered, no one could see his eyes. His jaw, mouth and chin looked exactly like Go Mifune, but, after all, what does that prove? All those racecar drivers look alike.

"It is I, Fast Racedriver!"

President Norcross said, "I thought your name was Speed Fester or Feed Spaster or something...."

Adolph muttered, "Und I wanted you to have the word 'Super' in your name..."

The super motorist put his fists on his hips. "Superhighway Fast Racer!"

A voice issued from the barrel. "If Super President joins us — "

President Norcross rose. "If you will excuse me, gentlemen, it just so happens —" But then at that moment, the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as the Drug Czar entered the pie shop asking for James Norcross. There was a bit of an altercation, since the Barrel thought that the Drug Czar was a supervillain of the same name, and the Secret Service hustled Norcross away at the first sign of danger.

A voice issued from the barrel. "If Super President joins us, this team, the Barrels of Justice—"

"All the 'of Justice' names are taken," said Santa wearily.

"Just call it the Super Santa Squad until we come up with a better name," suggested Adolph.

The lid of the barrel opened and a spooky figure in a hooded sweatshirt and a long black cape slid mysteriously out. "Fortunately, my barrel can also double as a convenient seat, as well as a raft, and a rolling, uh, thing. As I was saying, if Super President joins the squad, we will have one member whose body is charged with might born in a cosmic storm, who can turn into steel, or granite, or whatever the need requires."

"What about cheese?" asked the boy in the baseball cap, whose name no one had asked yet. "Can he do cheese?" The boy's name, for the record, was Kurio Mifune.

"Yes!" snapped Barrelman curtly with a savage motion of his hand. "What do you think *whatever the need requires* means? He can do cheese, rubber, adamantium, uranium, glass, whatever the need requires!"

"Ook! Ook!" observed the monkey. His name, for the record, was Sanpei. Whether or not he is related to Blip, Bleep, Gleep, and other space monkeys is a matter for speculation.

"I can provide the brains and detective work," said Barrelman, "Provided we concentrate on crimes that any criminals leaning on barrels tend to talk about. And Santa, do you have a magic ring or something? Flying reindeer?"

"Talking," muttered Santa. "Talking reindeer. We are working on the magic ring. For now, I have a brick in my bag."

Fast Racer said, "My car has a robot pigeon with a camera on it. It can also cut down bushes and shrubbery with twin sawblades that come out of the front fender. It can be useful for — um—let me think—"

Barrelman said, "So we have one member with impressive defensive skills, because he can turn into something bulletproof —"

"Including cheese!" chimed in Kurio.

"Ook! Ook!" pointed out the monkey.

"— and three members who can do basically nothing —" muttered Barrelman.

Fast Racer, looking worried, said, "O Master of the Barrel, what wisdom can you give us in this, our most beclouded hour?"

Solemnly, Barrelman said, "The lack of manpower can be replaced by the addition of firepower. Every superhero team needs a brick."

Santa said, "Exactly! The way the Fantastical Four has a hero called The Object, and the Avengers has the Incredible Bulk! By a *brick* you mean a hero of monstrous, superhuman strength who is nigh invulnerable!"

"No," said Barrelman, "I mean a hero who slides a brick slowly across the ice, sweeping away impediments and evils with a broom!" With a dramatic flourish, he turned toward the nondescript janitor. "YOU! I have penetrated your secret identity! Who else could you be except — Captain Curling, hero of the Most Boring Winter Game of All!" Turning to the others, he said, *sotto voce*, "The Captain and I met while I was disguised as a barrel that ice skaters were jumping during the Ecuadorian Winter Games back in '09. I was tracking down a Sporting Goods Themed Villain named Evil Luge."

Just then, with a tinkle of the door opening, Captain Curling, dressed in his Curling uniform, whatever that looks like, carrying a broom and a stone and toting an ice making machine came through the doorway, brushing the floor before a slowly moving stone which crossed the floor and thumped into the glass pie case, causing an impressive crack in the glass.

"Sorry I am late. It always takes me a long time to get here. My backstory is grim and bathetic but extremely long," intoned Captain Curling. "I was born of rich but proud parents in a mansion, and my every whim was attended to by a bevy of nurses and maids. Then, my father was gonked painfully in the head by an evil golf ball, raising a small welt ..."

"Whoa, wait!" interrupted Fast Racer. "I mean, seriously? My older brother is dead, killed by organized crime lords fixing races — and you are complaining about your Dad being bonked in the head?"

Captain Curling said, "That is when my father explained that he had taken a vow to fight pirates, as had his father before him and his before him, back to the Fifteenth Century, when the first of my line, called the Ghost Who Curls by the native tribesman of the coast of Africa where I and all my ancestors learned curling. Which is why I am called THE PHANTOM CURLER!"

"That," said Fast Racer, "Is a ridiculous backstory."

"It is better than saying my whole planet was blown up by a golf ball by Galactophagus playing golf with an asteroid, which was my other option."

"Besides," said Racer, "Your name is Captain Curling, not The Phantom Curler."

"Correct! You see, I was 4-F and unable to compete in the Winter Games, so in a secret project, I was given an experimental super soldier serum by Professor Pathos, before he was pathetically killed by Nazi spies."

Racer said, "Meaning you take steroids. Isn't that illegal?"

Captain Curling said, "Whereas special tires and jack-pistons that allow your car to do acrobatic leaps and climb walls is perfectly legal in your sport, eh?"

Santa said, "But if that man there is Captain Curling — WHO IS THAT?" and he pointed a trembling red-gloved hand at the sinister figure of the janitor.

The janitor quickly removed his cap and a fake-looking wig and donned a big black Mexican wrestling mask with a huge red X on it. Throwing aside his janitor's uniform, he wore a chauffeur uniform beneath it, one of the old fashioned kind with buttons up the side.

"It is I, Chauffeur X," intoned the figure. "I am the world's greatest driver of tricked out spy cars, and for reasons that cannot be revealed, I often help Fast Racer win races by protecting him against member of the Car Acrobatic Racecar Team, or C.A.R.T., led by Snake Oiler. But I am also the chauffeur and bodyguard of Super President...."

"Wait," said Fast Racer. "Why does Super President need a chauffeur if he wears a rocket belt, and why does he need a body guard if he can turn his body to steel, or granite, or whatever the need requires?"

"... and Super President sent me to tell you he has a very busy schedule, doing, um, super things. You can contact him by igniting the Great Seal of the United States Signal on the roof of the District Attorney's office. If it is at night. And if there is a low hanging cloud hanging conveniently nearby. And if he sees it."

"Now!" said Santa, "That the Santa Squadron has gathered as a team..."

"I like the name Squadron Supreme," said Adolph.

"That's taken," said Barrelman

"Racer Squadron Macross Plus," said Fast Racer.

"That's dumb," said Barrelman

"I like the University of Hawaii Rainbow Warriors," said Captain Curling.

"Taken AND dumb," said Barrelman.

Santa said, "Until Barrelman has his barrel cave ready, or I can get to my Fortress of Santatude at the North Pole, we can make the Haunted Pie Shop our headquarters. No one knows we are here, um, except for them ..." He pointed to the huge crowd of security officers, secret service agents, press, television cameramen and paparazzi clustered thickly outside the area where President Norcross was given a speech about the economy or health care or the war overseas or something.

"Who owns this pie shop?" said Fast Racer. "Does anyone know this Moe?"

Santa said, "I have it on good authority that the Moon is about to blow up, and I think that if we find the Super Strategist, that will be good for our squad's street cred. Also, someone will have to brave the supernatural horrors of Shadow Hill, looking for crime to keep our pie shop safe, and to find Moe."

**Justice Seeking Justice Vigilantes Of Justice For Justice**

*Joe* : “Hello this is Joe reporting live for channel over 9000 news. Today, I have a live interview with Utility Belt of the Justice Seeking Justice Vigilantes Of Justice For Justice. So, Utility Belt, how did your team meet?”

*Utility Belt* : “Well, Chief Justice asked me if I wanted to join after my first fight. I was dressed as Batman, because I didn’t know how to use my utility belt, and I had accidentally press a button that made a Batsuit unfold around me. He thought I was Batman. Wonder Boy was already on the team when I joined. Robbie Rocket Pants and the other members joined at the tryouts.”

*Joe* : “Wow. What will your team do?”

*Utility Belt* : “We have decided to go fight Lunabomber.”

*Joe* : “How did you come to this conclusion.”

*Utility Belt* : “We were hanging out at our secret base when Wonder Boy came running in and said, ‘Read this!’ He handed me a newspaper. I read the headline and said, ‘Super Strategist missing?’ And he said, ‘No! Lunabomber Manifesto! I read the article out loud. Robbie said, ‘Can’t we just ban detergent like we banned good light bulbs?’ Then Chief Justice said, ‘Being the just leader of this JUSTICE seeking team of Justice, for Justice!—I think we should bring this injustice doer to justice!’ And so we agreed.”

### **Team? What Team? We’re Not On a Team! I Don’t Even Know These Guys!**

*Kamen Rider Tokyo*: “Huh. Super Strategist is missing from a team I, a newcomer, have never heard of. I’d better go!”

*Lambda 7*: “Aye-aye-aye-aye-aye. The Super Strategist of the Aventures’ Guild is missing. We have to go after him!”

*Lone Power Ranger*: “Remind me again, Partner, who this guy is and why we should go after him?”

*Lambda 7*: “Sir, he is the strategist for the Adventurous Guild, one of the oldest and most well-known teams around. He has most likely been captured. We should go after him.”

*Lone Power Ranger*: “Oh, yeah. That guy. Okay. Sure. Why not! Let’s go!”

*Kamen Rider Godzilla*: “Raauurr!” (He goes after Super Strategist, too.)

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While looking downtown fruitlessly for a soda shoppe in which to hang, Betty chirps, "Ooo, it's a McDonald's! I think they have shakes."

"And fries!" adds Tina happily.

"I wonder what would happen if I sprinkled Dream Dust on them?"

"Maybe that's how you'd catch a Dream Boat."

Many giggles ensue.

The girls are dismayed when they enter an Inner City McDonald's.

"We should probably go now."

"I can't! I'm stuck to the floor!"

"Some superhero you are."

Tina's lasso eventually wins over the macadam of grease and spilled soda.

Outside, the girls spot the familiar shape of a hot dog cart. They are happily munching their half-smokes, crunching chips, and sipping soda, blissfully unaware of the many health hazards with which they are assaulting their size 2 bodies when Debbie spots the newspaper headlines.

"He's punching COWS... and Chickens. How cruel!"

"I got baby chicks for Easter last year!"

"Being mean to animals is just... wrong! I don't care if he's got hamfists. They'll be Spamfists(TM) by the time we're done with him."

Finishing their delicious and nitrate-laden lunch, the girls (and Charlie the Butterfly) hop the bus to deal with the farmhand of fear.



## SPECIAL MISSIONS

### **SUPER STRATEGIST MISSING !**

The city's tactical ace fails to show up at regular meeting of the Adventurer's Guild. Team members are worried -- he's the only one who NEVER misses a meeting! Can the Napoleon of Crimefighting have given up the cape?

*6 experience, +4 Fame*

*Superpresident, Barrelman, Kamen Rider Godzilla*

Fortunately, the Secret Service is busy guarding the Secretary of the Interior, allowing President Norcross to assume the guise of Superpresident! Meeting Barrelman at the sarsaparilla warehouse, he rolls the Oaken Oval of Order into the Adventurer's Guild's downtown haunts looking for clues. Neither is the sharpest bulb in the potato patch, but they do notice the giant lizard monster running his motorcycle back and forth in the same general vicinity.

All at once, all three of them suffer a rush of wits and realize that the other is probably the villain responsible!

They're wrong, of course. If Kamen Rider Godzilla ate Super Strategist, he'd admit it.

Kamen Rider Godzilla sees a man in a red and white costume, and a barrel. He, of course, attacks the man in the costume, sending Superpresident sprawling over the rooftops. Although transformed into steel and stone, skyscrapers are steel and stone, too, and Godzilla's pretty tough on those.

Barrelman attacks Kamen Rider Godzilla with his Barrelrang, which boings off the lizard's skull and then returns to Barrelman's hand. But just as Godzilla is readying to strike with his deadly fire breath, a light seems to kindle in the dull red sharklike eyes ... perhaps this barrel is a friend! Godzilla is a friend to barrels.

Revving his tach, the King of the Monster Bikers roars away, having clobbered the President of the United States real good.

No sign is found of Super Strategist, alas.

### **BLUEBLOODS SNEER AT MAYOR !**

Overbred bandit Eustace Tilly and the Bluebloods gang turn up their noses at the city and start stealing policemen's hats in public! Something about a scavenger hunt ...

*12 experience, +6 Fame*

*Away Team, Graffiti Guru*

Captain Starship and Science Officer Alien devise a cunning plan to trap the Bluebloods: put a policeman's hat on Lt. Decoy! And indeed, within mere weeks, Eustace Tilly emerges on a balcony to sneer down his spiky nose through his hand-held opera glass at the crudities of the peasantry! While the two Away Teamers are zapping him with really quite bright laser-pointer

phasers, the Bluebloods rush Lt. Decoy in a whirl of brass buttons and snuff, snatching his hat clean away!

Or, well, not so clean. One of them brandishes the hat in triumph, only to find an interlaced silver and blue “G” spray-painted on his buff coat! Naturally, he faints dead away from embarrassment.

The other Bluebloods grab Graffiti Guru by the arms and thrash him soundly, then deposit him upside-down in a refuse barrel. (Alas, it is a real barrel, not the terrible Barrel of the Night, Barrelman, in disguise.) Eustace Tilly holds up a mirror to check his haircurl, reflecting the laser-pointer beam right into Captain Starship’s eyes! This makes the Captain blind, and pretty angry as well.

First Officer Science Alien tackles another Blueblood, using the Big Heavy Flashlight Neck Pinch his planet is famous for. The Captain himself works the last of the Bluebloods like a speed bag, roughing up his midsection before planting a shoulder in his solar plexus and flipping him over his back! Into a trash can, which already contains Graffiti Guru.

Now the Overbred Bandit, Eustace Tilly, is outnumbered! The Away Team charges up the hotel stairs with a confidence born of a hundred crowded conventions. Tilly hides in his room, an absurdly tiny-topped end table in his hands, and when the Trekkers burst in, he swings it with all his outraged might at Captain Starship’s head, knocking Lt. Decoy headfirst into the hallway! The Away Team grab Tilly and hold him until police arrive, because hurling him over the balcony isn’t the Starfleet way.

*Eustace Tilly and the Bluebloods DEFEATED!*

*+5 Fame to the Away Team, +1 Fame to Shoji Shaman and the BACKUPS.*

### **AND THERE SHALL COME A HAMFIST!**

Hamfist, the Porcine Purveyor of Perfidy, is punching cows and chickens in the head with his huge hamlike fists! And you don't even want to KNOW what he does with bacon!

*18 experience, +4 Fame, +5 Fortune*

*Mean Dean, Manic Man, Serge the Colossal, Chicken Little, Flower Power Girls*

Hamfist has a ham on his green-and-yellow tights. Not an emblem in the shape of a ham, but an actual ham, from which he takes occasional refreshing bites during his rampage. He was thumping farm animals with his enormous fists and putting them in the sack, but the sack got full so he threw them on a wagon. Now the wagon’s getting full ...

“He’s taking everyone! He’s taking everything! ALL WE KNOW AND LOVE IS DOOMED!” cries Chicken Little, running around the barnyard. Hamfist hurries after him, but that little sucker is just so darn quick.

“Hey! Hamfist!” shouts an amplified voice. “This BARNYARD isn’t BIG ENOUGH for the FOUR OF US!”

A man with slicked-back hair and an electric purple tuxedo jacket challenges the mighty man-mountain of pork products.

“Four of us?”

“That’s right, FOUR! In THIS corner, weighing approximately ELEVEN hundred POUNDS, wearing GREEN and YELLOW like a BABY who’s PUKED up his STRAINED PEAS, the Buster of Bacon, the Pounder of Pork, the Tenderizer of Beef .. who’ll never SICKEN of LAMB and CHICKEEEEN ... you can’t DEFEAT this SLAB of MEAT, the one, the only ...

**HAAAAAAM ... FIST!”**

“Wow!” says Hamfist. “I gotta say, it’s nice to be appreciated for once ...” but no one hears him.

“And in this corner ... weighing two hundred and sixty pounds of animal aggression and feral cunning ... with a high-collared cape and velvet trunks from Elvis Liberace himself ... the king of the jungle who’s ready to rumble ... “Manic Man” JAMIE WILD!”

Manic Man Jamie Wild whips off his feather-trimmed ermine cape, whipping it in the air to cheers. The farm animals aren’t cheering (although they are watching, transfixed, at the spectacle), but the three wild-haired girls in tie-dyed cutoffs who just arrived in a Volkswagen van applaud enthusiastically. Manic Man blows them a kiss.

“Din’t you used to be a wrestler?” Hamfist says.

“And in THIS corner ... tipping the scales at 555 pounds ... seeking new challenges after defeating all comers in his native Europe, the country that INVENTED wrestling ... gifted with quite possibly the most breathtaking physique Nature in her magnificence ever bestowed on mortal Man ... the rock! The hard place! The immovable object and the irresistible force ... SERGE! THE! COLOSSAL!”

Serge the Colossal is, in fact, quite large. The announcer comes up to about his bellybutton. Serge confidently strides to his corner of the farmyard, waving to the tie-dye girls with a cheerful grin.

“Pleased to MEAT you,” he says to Hamfist.

“Which leaves THIS corner ...” says the announcer, blinking slowly. “Where Smash Samson was supposed to be.”

“We’ll take his place!” said the redhead in the bell-bottoms.

“And you are?”

“Dream Dust Debbie! This is Tie-Dye Tina, and here’s Betty Butterfly! We’re the Groovy Flower Power Girls, and we think hitting animals is just SO wrong! So watch out, Hamfist – you’re about to become SPAM-fist!”

“In THIS corner! Weighing, collectively, BARELY three hundred POUNDS, with combined hair length of over NINETY inches, attractively attired in patches and patchouli, bringing the Swinging Sixties to the Mean Teens, it’s ... the GROOOOOOOOVY FLOWER POWER GIRLS!”

“Yay!” says Betty Butterfly.

“Six against one,” Hamfist says. “That’s not exactly fair. I’m still gonna stomp you all, don’t worry, but for heroes, you’uns don’t seem to be too worried about your reputations.”

“SEVEN to one, you mean!” shouts the announcer. “For you face this night not MERELY the three mightiest wrestlers of all time and space –“

“Two,” says Serge the Colossal. “Smash is busy again.”

“- not ONLY the most peerless prophetic poultry in Pastureville, not ONLY the three loveliest flowers of the Summer of Love, coming straight from ’68, but also the main man of the megaphone, the Bouncer Announcer, the former undisputed heavyweight champion of Central States Universal Wrestling, the MAN, the MYTH, the LIVING LEGEND – MEAN DEAN!”

Hamfist looks around for another bulky opponent. After a minute, Serge starts looking too.

“ME!” shouts Mean Dean, tearing off his purple tuxedo coat.

“Now answer me this, Hamfist, and on your head be the consequences –

AAAARE YOU RRRRREADY TO RRRRRRUMBLE?”

Hamfist takes a step forward, then a pair of shuffling steps, breaking into a top-heavy run before slamming his massive arms into “Manic Man” Wild and knocking him back over a tractor.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” says Mean Dean.

Mean Dean leaps into the air, landing with both feet on one of Hamfist’s knees.

Dream Dust Debbie sprinkles glittering powder in the air, making Hamfist hallucinate rainbows. He tries to punch them.

Tie-Dye Tina tries out her Tie-Bo, punching and kicking to the beat.

Betty Butterfly summons a kaleidoscope of butterflies (look it up, that really is the collective term!) which flutter around Hamfist’s head. Since he sees them through the prism of Debbie’s dream dust, he probably sees several million discrete colored particles, like falling headfirst through an exploding fireworks waterfall.

“Manic Man” Wild groans, climbs up on the tractor, raises both arms dramatically and drops on Hamfist knee-first, in the well-known “Swiss Army Can Opener” hold.

Oh, and Chicken Little undermines his very willingness to continue living.

All of this happens pretty much at once, before the musclebound Hamfist can settle on an opponent. Then, he and Serge the Colossal collide.

WHOOOMP!

Serge staggers back from the impact. So does Hamfist. Mean Dean lies sprawled in the hay, having been caught by chance between the converging colossi. Serge goes to his knees, groggy, but doesn't fall. Hamfist doesn't fall either, but staggers around, totally bewildered, until a giant purple butterfly lands on his nose, fluttering cheerfully. Hamfist swings a wild punch and knocks himself out.

"Hey, you all right, there, buddy?" demands "Manic Man" of Serge.

"I think my boots are kind of muddy," he replies, dreamily.

"Yeah, he's good to go! Woo!" shouts the Manic Man.

"Yay! The Hamfist is defeated! Who's for some delicious lime Kool-Ade?" says Tina.

"So one villain's down! Awrrk! The sky's still falling! Awrrk! Awrrk!" says Chicken Little.

And everybody laughs. Except Dean, who's deeply unconscious and about two inches wide at this point.

*Hamfist DEFEATED!*

*+2 Fame, +2 Fortune to Flower Power Girls and Global Grappling All-Stars; +1 Fortune to Shoji Shaman and the B.A.C.K.U.P.S.*

### **ARE YOU READY TO ROCKWORM?**

The Rockworm tunnels through solid stone like air -- and you're not exactly made of solid stone!

Who can stop his aimless rampage?

*18 experience, +4 Fame, +4 Luck*

*Weasel Bag*

Weasel Bag wanted to try himself against a serious test. He was hoping the Rockworm would be something of a challenge ... worms are pretty small, you know?

This one isn't. In fact, it's canyon-sized, with a rotating drill-like mouth that bores through slate and shale like bathwater. It slices back and forth, switchbacking without apparent pattern all over the Champion River valley, until Weasel Bag arrives!

The Spice Weasel might have trouble cutting through all that gritty soil, so he unlimbers the Chill Weasel, to, like, calm everything down.

And to all appearances, once stroked with the Chill Weasel, the Rockworm's jagged rocky armor plates are ... calm. They don't move, they don't jitter, they don't nervously check their watches. They're rocks. Calm. Calmer than before? Maybe, maybe not. Hard to say.

And then the Rockworm heaves its back (which is most of it) upward and tunnels furiously back down into the earth, having snapped its massive jaws on Weasel Bag. So maybe that Spice Weasel was pretty spicy after all ...

*Weasel Bag CAPTURED! (We hope!)*

### **THE LUNABOMBER'S MANIFESTO!**

Radical anti-Terran terrorist the Lunabomber makes his final demand: he will blow the Moon from the sky, ending the tides and all life on Earth, unless everyone stops using detergent!

*24 experience, +6 Fame, +6 Luck*

*Shojo Shaman, Captain Curling, Chief Justice, Wonder Boy, Robbie Rocket Pants, Utility Belt, and Sofa Wizard*

Locating the Lunabomber's hideout would be difficult without a pair of rocket pants to soar high above the skyline and look down for anti-lunar iconography. But assuming you do, it's pretty easy to see the big Man-in-the-Moon-with-the-red-line-through-it symbol on the roof of an abandoned warehouse in the Industrial Park.

Only one hero on this case has rocket pants, but one is all you need! Robbie Rocket Pants reports back to the Justice Seekers, and they move in. Captain Curling sees the rocket trail and follows it, since his partner Fast Racer hasn't arrived yet. Not like him to be late ...

And Shojo Shaman, arriving on the subway, tries to go directly under the Moon, reasoning that the Lunabomber will need to be as close as possible to effect his nefarious scheme.

"You shouldn't have placed an Anti-Moon symbol on your roof, Lunabomber!" declares Chief Justice. "Prepare to receive justice!"

From the shadows emerges a man in a hoodie the colors of the Earth as seen from space. He has an Anti-Moon symbol on his chest and a short cape on his back. This, then, is the mystery menace who threatens the already-fragile Moon – the LUNABOMBER!

Captain Curling launches his stone across the concrete floor.

"The Moon doesn't have any rights," says the Lunabomber earnestly. "It's not a crime to destroy it!"

"Not if my Sofa has anything to say about it!" says Sofa King. "Just stand right there ..while I get this dolly strapped around it ..."

“You know ... I believe he’s right,” says Chief Justice in alarm. “The Moon has no rights. At least under American law, the only kind we’re allowed to enforce ... teammates, we may have to let him go!”

“We what?” says Wonder Boy in equal, if not slightly greater, alarm. “Are you sure, Chief?”

“I think my belt has a Lexis subscription,” says Utility Belt. “Hm, *Luthor vs. United States XVI*, here it is ... yep, the Moon has no rights. If he blows it up, no one on Earth has standing to complain ... oh, unless someone has sovereignty over the entire planet. Not just three-fourths of it, which would be Aquaman.”

“Wasn’t Luthor king of the world at one point?” Robbie Rocket Pants wants to know.

“For like ten minutes,” puts in Wonder Boy. “And it wasn’t the same ten minutes during which he blew up the Moon! Or tried to.”

“Exactly, costumed enviro-fascists!” gloats the Lunabomber. “You have no legal leg to stand on! And when my Red Matter Missile consumes the Moon, never again will we have to worry about tides, or werewolves, or that annoying glow through the window! There’s nothing you can do to .. ow!”

He falls, clutching his ankle, where something heavy has cracked him a good one.

“Looks like you’re the one with no leg to stand on, eh?” says Captain Curling.

Shojo Shaman peeks in, sees the villain lying on the floor, and breathes a visible sigh of relief. The sigh is pink, with white edges, and floats slowly up from her mouth.

“Whew! Glad you handled this one without me! The Moon’s still there, so I guess we can call the police and wrap this up!”

“Shojo Shaman?” says the Lunabomber from the floor. “The girl whose powers MAKE NO SENSE? You’re not just guilty of polluting the oceans, but the entire stratum of cause and effect! You are my ARCH-NEMESIS!”

“Whoa,” says Wonder Boy. “Arch-nemesis. Too bad, Miss Shaman. That’s a heavy burden of responsibility.”

“I don’t even know this guy!” she exclaims.

“That’s another team,” Chief Justice reminds her.

“You think you have me helpless, do you?” says the Lunabomber. While Chief Justice and Wonder Boy nod in agreement, he goes on, “Well, what’s Captain Curling going to do now, with his sporting stone over here with me?”

“He’s got a point, eh? I can’t carry two of the little fellas. They’re heavy.”

“And what are the rest of you going to do ... when you find my philosophy is far from mine alone!”

From the shadows, many men and some women emerge, dressed in robes with Earth emblems on them. Each carries a piece of the Earth with them; some metallic, some wooden, a few ceramic in nature. But all natural, and all rather hard.

“Anti-Lunar League!” shouts the Lunabomber, rocking back and forth holding his foot.  
“ATTACK!”

“I KNEW this warehouse was unusually large for one guy and his deathtrap!” exclaims Wonder Boy.

**Shojo Shaman** flips open her magic fan and coats it with magic eye shadow, in the Moon Survival Rainbow Fan of Clearly Seeing Technique! This helps her clearly see the big iron stick being swung at her by an Anti-Lunar League fanatic. He misses, knocking her fan aside in a shower of butterflies and Chinese characters, like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, who kick the Lunar Leaguer in the lunar trousers. Hard.

**Chief Justice** nimbly evades a pair of Leaguers armed with rakes, then commands them in a stern voice, “Sit down and wait your turn! You are OUT OF ORDER!” They do, and then he bonks them with his gavel. This makes them mad, except the one who falls down holding his head. They surround Chief Justice and try to think of a court-related pun before finishing him off. This gives the Chief time to bonk more of them with his gavel. Then they close in, capturing him at the cost of a lot of bumps on the head.

**Wonder Boy** gets grabbed by one blue-gowned goon and hammered in the belly by another. But with athletic grace, he flips one of them over his head into the other, tumbling them both in a heap! Then, unfortunately, a heavy volume of global-warming printouts swung by an unseen hand lays him low.

**Robbie Rocket Pants** can’t get much altitude in this warehouse, but he can certainly get speed! He rockets through a crowd of Anti-Lunar loons, shielding his head with his arms at the last moment. Like tenpins, they scatter! Like tenpins, they don’t get up again.

**Utility Belt** presses a button, and a flare on a parachute shoots out! It blossoms into a huge banner reading “SEND HELP” and blinking on and off. It’s of limited usefulness indoors, and the Lunar League pounds him silly.

**Sofa Wizard** backs behind his sofa. When his opponents try to climb over the sofa, he pulls the accordion lever, letting the sofabed fold out by surprise! The Anti-Lunar lunatics get pinned underneath.



**Captain Curling** is clobbered by several robed maniacs, but his curling armor (necessary for any sport involving the sliding of stones) protects him to the extent of bruises and bumps only. He swings his broom in wild arcs, driving back his assailants! No one wants to be hit with a broom. This gives him time to reach the Red Matter Missile, put his shoulder to it, and send it sliding slowly across the floor! Brushing dust aside with his broom keeps its momentum going. Additional Leaguers leap on Captain Curling, bearing him down with sheer numbers, as the Missile ponderously progresses toward the doors, its “FIRE COUNTDOWN” button blinking faster and faster!

Shojo Shaman, Robbie Rocket Pants, and Sofa Wizard are the only ones left to stop the remaining Leaguers! Two of them have helped the limping Lunabomber to his feet, and shuffle him slowly after his sliding Red Matter Missile. The warehouse appears to be built on a slight incline, and the Moon-wrecking weapon slides with increasing speed! Only Robbie Rocket Pants is fast enough to catch it before it rolls out into the street.

Shojo Shaman tries Victory of Love Fire Sun Dimension Wrath Quake, which causes the entire warehouse to collapse in flames. Leaguers scatter, unable to approach her. Then she uses her Battle-Finishing Hope of Great Advancement Sky Cloud Fury Mountain Storm, but by the time she’s finished saying that, her opponents have fled.

Sofa Wizard tries quickly re-folding his sofa to attack again, but the escaping Leaguers run right over him, pinning him helplessly beneath his sofa. “Ironic,” he moans, “that for once, it is the sofa resting its weight gratefully upon me, rather than the reverse.”

The Lunabomber approaches Robbie Rocket Pants with great malevolence. Robbie is out-powered, but not out-speeded, if that’s even a word ... igniting not just his rocket pants but the rocket fuel in his Rocket Pockets, he soars skyward, taking the Red Matter Missile with him! The Lunabomber grins and presses a remote control ... but the missile isn’t aimed even approximately at the Moon any more, and blasts off like an evil red spark into the empty sky!

Someday, far in the distant future, the Red Matter Missile may be a grave threat to that generation’s heroes. But not today, Lunabomber. Not today.

Neither Shojo Shaman nor Robbie Rocket Pants can find the Lunabomber, who may return to bedevil the world again. Especially his arch-enemy, Shojo Shaman ...

*Shojo Shaman and the BACKUPS: +2 Fame, +1 Luck*

*Super Squadron: +1 Fame, +1 Luck*

*Justice Seeking Vigilantes of Justice For Justice: +3 Fame, +3 Luck*

### **DIAMOND HEISTS GALORE!**

Criminals are chipping through walls to steal all the diamonds in town! The Industrial Diamond Show in Burns Industrial Park adds extra security.

*12 experience, +6 Fame*

*+1 Fortune per hero from part-time security wages*

*Novelator, Bongo Drummer Boy*

Wearing “Superhero Security” stickers over their costumes, the Novelator and Bongo Drummer Boy may really have it made now! People are nice to them, there’s a Green Room with free soda and coffee, and they fill out W-2s and everything. Mr. Spencer even asked if they could work overtime this weekend! Time and a HALF!

Then the very walls judder with chipping, squeaking vibrations. Cracks appear, building like spiderwebs until a huge hole crumbles in the concrete!

Through the choking gray dust emerge fantastic forms out of nightmare ... well, dream, anyway. Clad in red and black robes with mystic symbols, wielding picks, shovels and jackhammers, the secret of the attacker’s contempt for stonemasonry is revealed – every tool bears a gleaming, glittering cutting edge of purest diamond!

“The Ancient and Hermetic Order of Stonecutters hereby annexes these gemstones to the cause of World Freestonecuttery!” says their leader, a bald man with a posh English accent. “Yield these mineral treasures or pit your puny bones against centuries of secret stone-cutting techniques!”

“But over the centuries, your order has lost sight of its true purpose!” says the Novelator. “Indeed, the original founding of the Stonecutters was to restrict and confine the practice of stonecutting to the small body of elite masters who could be trusted with the power to literally reshape the very bones of the Earth! Coming out in public and ADMITTING you’re a Stonecutter is anathema to everything the first Stonecutters believed! Sir, you are NO TRUE STONECUTTER!”

“Yeah! That sounds plausible!” adds Bongo Drummer Boy. “Ba-bow bow bow-bow ba-bomp-bomp bomp bomp ba-bomp-bomp-BOMP!”

“I ... why ... that is untrue, though certainly plausible, Security Guard!” blusters the leader of the Stonecutters. “Don’t listen to his fictive lies, fellow masters of masonry!”

The other Stonecutters mumble ... they’re not really so sure. If they’re a secret society, busting into the Convention Center kinda DOES sound like it’s not in keeping with their founding principles ...

“Could it be?” asks a dazed member with a diamond snow shovel. “Could it be we’re not really ... TRUE Stonecutters?”

“Bah!” shouts their leader. “Could a false Stonecutter do THIS?”

And he saws through the granite-sheathed concrete pillar holding up part of the ceiling.

“That’s it, baldy! It’s ON like Bongo Kong!” says Bongo Drummer Boy. He sets up a side-to-side rhythm on the Stonecutter Leader’s head, producing an echoy, warbly sort of sound.

Concrete chunks by the dozens bury the Novelator, the Stonecutters, and Bongo Drummer Boy. When the dust settles, the heroes and villains are gone .. and so are all the diamonds!

*Novelator and Bongo Drummer Boy CAPTURED! (Again, we HOPE!)*

## PATROL

**Sodapop Curtis and Ponyboy Curtis** patrol downtown. Sodapop has no idea how to locate criminals, but Ponyboy steers him to the Big Noise Generator, an after-hours club packed with hoodlums. Some of them emerge and start trying to steal a car, so the Outsiders jump them!

Sodapop jacks one guy up against the car door, while Ponyboy jumps on another's back and pulls on his hair. Actually, Ponyboy's move hurts worse than Sodapop's. But both end up with the enemy running away in pain, or just lying there in pain. And the car isn't even scratched!

**Darrell Curtis and The Man Eating Cow** stay in The Cauldron and patrol. Count Indigo, the brooding, shadowy vampire, demands they leave his dark domain, but Darrell's not having any of that. He thumps the Count high and low, driving him back into the Man-Eating Cow, who tries to eat him. But the Count is too quick for her, and gives her bell a yank. His darkness spreads across the Man-Eating Cow's reddish sharklike eyes, pulling her down into the void of sleep, where he will feast on her half-ton of ultra-rare beef ...

Until Darrell punches him again. His blows do little harm, but they do distract the Count for a vital second, allowing the Cow to eat him.

## MEANWHILE ...

**Smash Samson** is stuck all day approving his Saturday morning TV show, which despite his efforts will have Foldy the Talking Chair as the major character.

**Kamen Rider Tokyo** cannot reach Champion City from downtown Tokyo on a motorcycle.

**The Lone Power Ranger** is attacked by rubbery aliens from outer space and has to kick them.

**Johnny Cade** has to stay after school for writing on the underside of his desk.

**Fast Racer** is passed by Snake Oil on the highway and chases him to Kansas. This takes him all morning.

**Supermarket Santa's** boss, Rhoda Coaster, transforms into Black Beauty, agent of Halloween Star, and turns the ornaments of the city into grasping, biting, grinning skulls! This may run all the way through New Year's ...

**Bag Lady** can't smell often. Too many guns. No lunch, no fire-breathing lunch! Doncha get it?