

MYSTERY MEN COMICS ISSUE 53

IT'S BRAGGIN' TIME!

Bombastro, the Boastful Braggart of Braggadocio, has taken over the Cauldron! Every gang in the city now follows his call -- including helpless hero the Man-Eating Cow! Now his ultimate gang turns its sights on the docks ...

Super Squadron, Outsiders, Mean Dean, Team? What Team?, Chicken Little, the Flash (who was just trying to patrol the docks, and saw plenty of crime ... all bunched together, like in a gang)

“Now WHAT do we have here?” boomed the amplified voice of Bombastro

“Blazing Franklin’s Ghost!” said Super President. “It seems our attempt to sneak into the gangsters’ camp was discovered! But how? I only wear bright colors!”

“Grawr,” said Godzilla, looming above the tenements.

“It’s a mystery, all right,” Captain Curling said.

“Doom! We’re all doomed!” added Chicken Little.

“You sure are!” Bombastro agreed. “Me an’ my brothers here count forty ... THOUSAND ... warriors. Think you can take us all on?”

“Yeah!” said Sodapop. “Your gangs ain’t spit. We all know the greasers are the best.”

“You mean the OUTSIDERS?”

“No! I mean, yeah, that’s what they call us. But we’re greasers, same as lots of others. What are you blockheads following this guy for?”

A young man in plastic batting helmet, baseball uniform, and divided face paint stepped out of the mob.

“We’re following him cause we’re tired of gettin’ pushed around, Sodapop,” he said. “Tired of all the Soshs looking at us like we’re dirt. We’re dirty, yeah. We work for a living! And now we’re gonna go to work some more ... on THEM!”

The gang cheered.

“Brothers!” boomed Bombastro. “Don’t be hating the superheroes, brothers. After all, what do they do? Do they join the cops? Do they pick up the gun? NO! They dress up in colors and they fight in the streets. Just. Like. Us.

“CAAAN YOU DIG IT?”

“WHY are you wearing a mask at two in the morning? Because the MAN gave you a nothing job. The MAN kept you inside all day, pretending to be civilized. Because the MAN won’t let you prove you’re a man, with your FISTS, so you have to go out and TAKE your manhood back!”

“And for those of you sisters ...” Bombastro grinned. “All the best men are right here.”

“What do we want? We want our POWER heard! We want our COURAGE to count for us! We want to take back this city for the real men and women who got the GUTS to take it! Can you dig it?”

“Yes,” said Captain Curling unexpectedly. “I CAN dig it.”

“Fight it!” demanded Supermarket Santa. “Use your Christmas willpower!”

“It’s always Christmas in Canada,” said Captain Curling. “It gets old, eh? He’s right – everyone laughs at curling. See this stone? It’d knock your head in, if you were lying down on the ice and somehow prevented from moving. No more laughing at my life’s work, eh? I want some darned respect, darn it!”

“Now, now,” said Super President. “There’s no need for profanity. Let’s just join Bombastro and take over the city with our super powers, and everyone can go home unruffled.”

“Right, Super President!” declared Barrelman. “It’s time to Roll Out the Barrel!”

Most of the superheroes crossed the gap into Bombastro’s gang. The gangers pounded their backs, pumped their fists, and offered various beverages to their new comrades.

“That’s right, fellows,” Super President said genially. “Vote Norcross!”

The Man-Eating Cow, Super President, Captain Curling, Barrelman, Johnny, Darrell, Sodapop, Chicken Little, and Kamen Rider Godzilla looked back at their buddies, standing on the other side:

Ponyboy, Supermarket Santa, Mean Dean, the Lone Power Ranger, and the Flash.

“Oh, this ain’t good,” Ponyboy opined. “Santa, Dean, you in? Or are you going to chicken out, too?”

“Listen, I was just patrolling for crime, right?” said the Flash. “So I found it. The biggest concentration of criminals I’ve ever seen outside a mall. This is what I picked up the flashlight

and put on the “Hello My Name Is” badge to do – to battle the forces of evil, whether within or outside of a retail-based setting. I’m staying.”

“Me too,” said Supermarket Santa. “Always knew it would end like this – facing the President in an alley. Say, Flash, did you ever work the Larsendale Mall?”

“I knew it was you, Santa #6,” said the Flash. “See you in the funny papers.”

“WAIKOOM!” shouted the Lone Power Ranger. “Watakushi-wa Lone Power Ranger walakimasu!”

“He’s bailing, right?” said Ponyboy.

“I don’t speak Japanese,” said Supermarket Santa. “But hang on – I think one of the toys in my Power Sack does ...”

Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Suzy, the Pacific unity doll, translated the Lone Power Ranger’s words.

<Friends! Battle companions of extended time in the past duration! Do not forsake the spirit chains our spirit ancestors wove these many times past out of spirit tigers!>

“Spirit tigers. Well , that oughta do it,” said The Flash. “Thanks, Lone Power Ranger ...”

<You are right! That which has come before lights the path to where we will be in the future, like the arc lights on a superhighway!>

Fast Racer stepped out of the crowd.

“I will stand with my honorable comrades,” he declared. “I am sorry, Bombastro. I would indeed like to prove my honor in hand-to-hand combat with the forces of order. But my obligations to family and comradeship are stronger.”

He crossed over to join the five remaining heroes.

“I am truly honored you would forsake your emotions for your duty,” said the Lone Power Ranger.

“Could any decent man do anything else?” Fast Racer replied, making light of his weighty sacrifice.

“No, of course not. But you did it, of your own free will, and I honor you for it.”

“So it’s six against eight,” said Ponyboy. “That’s a little better. Too bad no one else spoke Japanese ...”

GWARR!

Godzilla lurched over a crane and smashed a warehouse flat under his armored belly. He stomped over to stand beside (over) Ponyboy's friends.

"So that's how it's gonna be," said Bombastro slowly. "Some of you wanna break on thru, but the rest just wanna stay in your chains. We're gonna BREAK those chains, brothers! Either off of your necks ... or OVER YOUR HEADS!"

The gangsters roared. Their roar filled up the docks and rumbled back from the far side of the river.

Godzilla roared back, which made a lot of them shut up. But then Bombastro spoke:

"Don't be afraid of a little atomic fire, brothers. Whatever doesn't KILL you ... gives you SUPERPOWERS!"

Super President nodded.

"He's right, that's the way it works."

Then Bombastro's speakers crackled again, but a different voice boomed forth:

"Seven against seven! Friend against friend! Brother against brother for the fate of the city! LIVE from the City Docks, you are HERE IN PERSON for the throwdown of the century – the BLOODBATH in BLUDHAVEN!"

The gangers whooped it up, cheering until Bombastro cut them off with a wave of his bathrobed arm.

"You got a lot of nerve crashing my party, Mean Dean," he said. "I wonder – do you really think you got what you need to go man to man with ALL of us?"

"I got a mic and a bow tie, slick," shot back Mean Dean. "That's one bow tie more than I need!"

"In this corner, looking lean and mean, the gangs of Champion City. Bombastro claims they number forty thousand strong, but unless each of you counts as ten, that's a long count in anyone's book. Still, don't count them out till the final count:

The Suzies, assassins from the East.

The Furriers, always dressed to kill.

The Suits, ruthlessly downsizing anyone who opposes them.

The Not So Goody Boys, putting the rhyme into crime!

The Frat Boys, still on double-secret probation for lethal hazing.

And the Disco Boys, now with twice as much theme and MUCH MORE MUSIC!

"And let's not forget their tag team partners in tonight's Civil War by the Devil's Shore:

“From Washington, D.C., he’s made of any material the task requires and employs six million bureaucrats! The one, the only, for three more years, SUPER PRESIDENT!

“From Canada, a country to the north of here, peopled by strange mirror images of ourselves, comes the Broom of Doom, the Skater Perpetrator, the Slider, the Collider, CAPTAIN CURLING!

“From who knows where in the dark of the night, where barrels lurk by the score, the Dark Night Drum, the Vat of Vengeance, the Inky Cloak of Heart of Oak, give it up for BARRELMAN!

“He’s on the make for an easy score, and the world holds no terrors for this greaser! You fear no man when your name is SODAPOP!

“He works two jobs -- kicking butt and taking names -- and his name-taking pencil just broke! Stay out of the way of DARRELL CURTIS!

“He’s the youngest, but also the bravest. It takes a big man to face life right in the eye and take its best shot, and when you’re done taking your shot, then you’ll have to deal with JOHNNY CADE!

“He’s small! He’s yellow! And he FORETELLS THE DOOM OF THE WORLD! It doesn’t matter if you get in his way or not – you’re all under the SAME SKY as CHICKEN LITTLE!

“And finally, all the newspapers agree – man eating beef may be unhealthy, but it’s not news. But BEEF eating MAN – now, THAT’s the headline of horror that could only be called the MAN-EATING COW!”

“There’s no way. We’re goin’ down,” Ponyboy said. “But I’m taking one of them with me. For Darryl, and Sodapop, and Johnny.”

“Hold on, kid,” whispered Mean Dean with his hand over the microphone. “Wait’ll you hear OUR buildup!”

“And in this corner –“ he began, but his microphone squealed and died.

“Doom!” exclaimed Chicken Little. “Nothing ever works when you need it to!”

“I’ll TELL you who’s in THIS corner,” Bombastro said, his voice effortlessly ringing to every corner of the Docks without amplification.

“From Nowhere, going nowhere, not even from Champion City! He’s not sure what he’s doing here, but he’s too stubborn to lay down and die. I give you PONYBOY CURTIS!”

Darrell, Johnny and Sodapop whistled, hooted and clapped. The other gangers weren’t sure if they were supposed to cheer or not, since Ponyboy was on the other side.

“From the North Pole of the Universe, by way of Macy’s Upstairs Christmas Attic, carrying a sack of toys for little, bitty, whiny, bratty kids, empowered by an intelligence from space that wouldn’t even give him the keys to the closet, SUPERMARKET SANTA!”

Supermarket Santa looked hurt. He also looked angry. An angry Santa can be scary, even without swords and forearm tattoos.

“From the weirdest depths of Japanese television, the man whose adventures were too cheap to animate, the hero who couldn’t afford any friends, the LONE POWER RANGER!”

“Ay-yi-yi, Lone Power Ranger! He’s making fun of YOU!”

"And from late at night in the empty mall, riding his little scooter around the empty cups on the floor, shining his light into windows full of stuff he could never afford, it's the FLASH! No, not from the Justice League. The other guy."

"HE's the other guy, you mean," muttered the Flash. "Hey, I work for a living."

"From late night cable, in grainy black and white, stretching his rubber costumes until the seams show, the Lizard that No One Believes, the punch line of a million late-night comics! If you're totally out of ideas, why not throw in GODZILLA!"

"NOW! Who's gonna stand with ME, and who's gonna team up ... or DOWN .. with THEM?"

The leader of the Suits put on his camel-hair overcoat and stubbed out his cigar on the concrete. He snapped his fingers at his boys, and together the Suits gathered around their leader and crossed over to Mean Dean's side.

"Et tu, Big Tobacco?" Bombastro intoned.

"There's something I've learned in forty years in this business, Bombastro," Big Tobacco shot back. "Everything burns. EVERYTHING. And they've got Godzilla."

Bombastro bridled with anger. He threw his arms wide for attention. A hush fell over the rowdy crowd, as everyone waited for him to speak.

Headlights cut across the warehouses from the far side of the river. A white minivan with a red stripe crossed the Galaxy Girl Bridge into the Bludhavn Docks.

“Captain’s log, 0302.14. While on a routine patrol of the docks, we picked up a strange signal ...”

“Captain, I’m picking up a strange signal,” said Decoy, as he rounded a street corner.

“Open frequencies, Lieutenant.”

The grim faces of the crew locked a unified gaze into the ether as the voice of the most boisterous baddy of Braggadocio crackled across the airwaves.

“Bombastro!” Starship’s fist pounded the pleather armrest.

“Can you count, suckers? I say, the future is ours... if you can count! Now, look what we have here before us. We got the Rockworm boys sitting next to the Stone Cutters. We've got the Patriotic Animal Party right by the Man-Eating Cow. Nobody is wasting nobody. That... is a miracle. And miracles is the way things ought to be.”

“I’ve heard enough, shut it off,” commanded Starship.

“I don’t know, Captain, he’s making an awful lot of sens-SMACK!” Decoy couldn’t finish his sentence before Starship slapped him on the top of his head. “OW!! What’d you do THAT for!”

“Listen, Decoy ... Bombastro and I go way back. We were in the academy together.”

“Wait ... you were in military school with this joker?” asked Bones.

“Yeah, and we were friends, too ... until he took everything away from me. First, he took my girlfriend. Then, he accused me of cheating and got me kicked out.”

“Whoah, seriously?” asked the crew collectively. “Why did he do that?” asked Decoy.

“I was the captain on the debate of the debate team, and he wanted to be captain. He challenged me to a public debate in front of the entire school.”

Cocking his head to one side, Science Alien inquired, “Did you win?”

Starship smiled slightly, “I ate his lunch. He declared himself the winner, but everyone saw right through his celebration of one. After realizing his embarrassment, he swore he’d get revenge. The next month, a copy of the mid-term answer keys were found in my desk drawer. I was kicked out, and Bombastro got his wish ... he became the next captain of the debate team.”

“That son of a ...”

“Bones! It’s OK. That was a long time ago. But now, he’s become dangerous, and we need to find a way to stop him. ... He’s headed for the docks ... Turn here, I have an idea.”

The shuttlevan turns down an alley and comes to a stop. The Away Team crew jump out, grab some equipment from the back, and climb up a set of fire escapes to the roof of a building near the dock entrance.

As Bombastro and his Gang of Gangs confront their foes, there comes a crackle, an amplified scream, and the voice of an old friend.

“Bombastro, my old friend. It’s been a long time since the academy. Are you prepared for a debate rematch, or are you content to be a gang-leader who will always be nothing more than second-best?”

Captain Starship, dramatically lighted on the roof of the building is holding a megaphone in his hands, while Science alien and Decoy position themselves nearby with their phasers at the ready. Bones begins to prepare some hypodermics for the inevitable ...

"Timmy boy!" Bombastro burst out. "I never know when you're going to strike ..."

"Enough small talk, Bombastro. My crew has taken over your sound system, and we're prepared to do the same to your criminal army. I don't expect you to surrender, but Federation law requires --"

"I never answer demands from plebes, Timmy boy! Don't you get it? You never had a chance against me! I can command these gangs on their own level -- I'm still sixteen years old! Look at you -- you're an old man!"

"We'll see about that," said Captain Starship. "After all these years, the one thing I want to do is knock the tar out of you, Bombastro. But not the people you've deceived into following your insane crusade. NOT the PEOPLE, Bombastro!"

Captain Starship swung down a fire escape into the gangster's midst.

"Go on, hit me. In the heart, in the head -- I won't stay down! And next time I'll hit you -- the good old game of war. Stomping the bad guys!"

He turned to the gangs, turning his back on Bombastro.

"Be a fool! Be a pawn! Be a good soldier who never questions orders! While some -- jerk -- stands up there and laughs. Maybe we are killers, but for ourselves, our own causes! Not for him. Tell him we're not going to kill today - not for Bombastro."

A lot of the gangers stirred uneasily. Bombastro waved them to silence.

"I needed to cheat to beat you in debate before, Starship," he said. "Like you cheated when you rewrote the simulation to beat me in the spelling bee. "Kobiyashi" isn't even an English word! But I don't need to cheat now. I've been working for years, channeling and crafting my voice and oratory, for every audience and every occasion. And now, I'm going to destroy you, with three simple words:"

Vroom, VROOM, VROOOOM!

A custom silver and white motorcycle ramped off the roof of a nearby warehouse. Kamen Rider Tokyo launched over the handlebars into the air, flipped once and landed with his cherry-armor biker boots extended, kicking Bombastro right in the face.

“Hello, Champion City, I am Kamen Rider Tokyo, the man who walks the path of heaven, to rule over all...apparently.”

"Bombastro's down!" cried a gangster.

"There wasn't supposed to be no motorcycles!" wailed another.

"GETTUM!" they yelled, or rather roared, together.

And then, well ...

The Suzies vs. First Officer Science Alien: First Officer Science Alien pinches one of the Suzies, who kinda likes it. He recoils, and they hold him at gunpoint till he drops his laser pointer. Excuse me, PHASER pointer. Still.

The Furriers vs Ponyboy They clobber him with dyed-fur handbags, and he hesitates to hit chicks. Not good.

The Not So Goody Boys vs. Mean Dean. A rap battle of dueling mics has the Not So Goody Boys reeling from Mean Dean’s snapping style, so one of them shoots his amplifier with a pistol held sideways. Sure, the guy gets the recoiling pistol right in the face, but Dean is effectively silenced.

The Frat Boys vs. Dr. Bones. Dr. Bones jabs injectors into the backs and arms of several of Pi Zeta’s Death Pledges, but when he gets down to the three-year men, their drug tolerance is just too much for his over-the-counter Feinbergers to overcome.

Disco Boys vs. Kamen Rider Tokyo. Kamen Rider Tokyo parries with cherries, unleashes the demon inside him, and stabs his sword through Tony P’s gold record! The Disco Boys fall back in disarray – could he be the one destined to rule over all, as Donna Summer predicted?

Super President vs. Lone Power Ranger Using the power of the Beta Capsule, Lone Power Ranger assumes gigantic size and strikes karate poses! Using the power of the Super Presidency, Super President assumes gigantic size and alters his body structure until he is literally made of karate! Unfortunately, this means when Lone Power Ranger attacks, Super President’s arms, legs, stomach, head, back, front, teeth and nose all try and block at the same time, causing Lone Power Ranger to karate chop Super President everywhere at once! Super President falls, transforming into money, which is what the situation requires. Money and deregulation.

Captain Curling vs. Supermarket Santa “By the POWER of CHRISTMAS!” Gifts by the score shower around Captain Curling! What is the perfect gift for the exemplar of Canadian ice-brooming sports? Why, brooms and big polished stones, of course! The sticks and stones do not, quite, break the Captain’s bones, but he’s out. A few minutes later, his curling stone smacks Supermarket Santa on the ankle, which really stings.

Barrelman vs. Captain Starship. Suddenly, Barrelman disappears! All that remains is an ordinary barrel. Captain Starship approaches warily, then suddenly a pair of barrels falls from a great height! Captain Starship dodges aside, into the grasp of Barrelman, who was right there all along in a plain, unremarkable, unnoticed barrel. Captain Starship sets his keychain blaster to “taser” and shocks Barrelman into insensibility, but Barrelman has a tight grip on him, and Barrelmen are notoriously electroconductive. So Captain Starship goes down, too.

Sodapop vs. Lt. Decoy Sodapop punches Lt. Decoy, kicks him, trips him, and elbows him in the gut. But the valiant red-shirt refuses to fall! So Sodapop waits a few seconds, and Decoy steps on a land mine.

Darrell vs. Big Tobacco Darrell isn't afraid of getting sued, but he is afraid of losing his job, so Big Tobacco gets the drop on him and clouts him over the head. Thing is, Darrell's got a pretty hard head. He rumples Big Tobacco's suit – from the INSIDE. Ouch!

Johnny vs. the Flash! Johnny flails with a bit of wood, and the Flas counters with an 8-cell flashlight. And the flashlight still works – at least, it leaves Johnny seeing stars!

Chicken Little vs. Fast Racer Fast Racer can outrun any car! But he can't outrun ... the sky. Chicken Little sits on the dash board and describes Fast Racer's inevitable doom until jerking the wheel to the left and escaping seems like a good idea. The Chicken flutters away.

Man-Eating Cow vs. Godzilla Man-Eating Cow is willing to branch out to eating lizard – it tastes like chicken! Radioactive chicken. But there's just so MUCH to eat! Plus, it tingles. The Cow gets tired of eating. Then Godzilla remembers that he kinda likes beef.

The winners look around for another opponent:

The Suzies vs. Kamen Rider Tokyo The Suzies surround Kamen Rider Tokyo and pummel him without mercy. Kamen Rider Tokyo transforms his motorcycle into a battle mech and sweeps the Suzies off the ground with both motorcycle arms! But being Japanese themselves, the Suzies do not fear the mecha as they should, and grab hold of the robot arms, causing Kamen Rider to overbalance into the water. The mechacycle shorts out.

The Not So Goody Boys vs. Lone Power Ranger 5/2 The Lone Power Ranger uses his silver bullets to scatter the Not So Goody Boys, then uses karate moves to generate electric fields of silvery energy to shock them senseless! Yo.

The Frat Boys vs. the Flash! Red Solo cups of gasoline drive the Flash back to the edge of the docks! Where he busts out the blinding power of 8 D-Cells, and the Frat Boys all cover their eyes. Allowing him to ride his mall scooter dramatically through the flames and conk them.

Sodapop vs. Supermarket Santa “You've been a very good boy, Johnny! Today, you get ALL the toys!” Santa swings his Bag of Christmas Holding and clonks Johnny with all the toys for all

the good little boys and girls of the entire world, then finishes him with another sack containing all the coal for all the bad little boys and girls. It's a heavy sack.

Darrell, Chicken Little, and the Furriers vs. Godzilla Darrell is big, tough and brave, but come on! He doesn't even have an Oxygen Destroyer. How you gonna go up against the Lizard without no Oxygen Destroyer? Shoot. Plus, Darrell's kinda flammable.

However, Chicken Little wears Godzilla down with dark whispers and bold imaginings. Then the Furriers kick the body. They have to kick him a lot, but Chicken Little's already done the work.

Chicken Little vs. Lone Power Ranger and the Flash! "Your mall is doomed! You have a dead end job! Your mall is doomed! You have a dead end job!"

"That hurts," admits the Flash. "But so does this."

And he uses the Flashlight to hockey-puck Chicken Little into the Lone Power Ranger's chicken cage. Which he has thoughtfully brought along.

"Ay-yi-yi, Chicken Little! Now you are the one who is doomed!"

"I've been saying that this whole time!" says Chicken Little.

The Furriers vs. Supermarket Santa The Furriers wanted fur for Christmas. No surprise, there. But what is a surprise is when they try to fit individual squirrel furs over their bodies! Sure, these ladies are a size zero, but squirrels are more like size negative 10. And Santa doesn't give negative gifts, ladies.

And then ...

The Lone Power Ranger, the Flash!, and Supermarket Santa vs. Bombastro: "Now hold ON there, brothers. Can't we .. TALK this OVER?"

Supermarket Santa does not try to engage Bombastro in witsicuffs, but just stuffs him in his sack. Some bad little boy in Outer Mongolia's getting a chatterbox that just won't quit under the tree this year ... and unless Bombastro speaks Mongolian, he's not going to be able to convince that little boy of anything.

BOMBASTRO (among many others) DEFEATED!

Super Squadron: +3 Fame

Outsiders: +2 Fame

Mean Dean + 1 Fortune

Team? What Team? +2 Fortune

Shojo Shaman and the Backups: +2 Fortune

1 xp per hero

2 xp for Kamen Rider Tokyo, Sodapop, Darrell

3 xp for Chicken Little

4 xp for Supermarket Santa, Lone Power Ranger, and the Flash!

HEROES ARE HARD TO FIND!

Admiral America, Johnathan Harker Jr., Super Strategist, Professor Socrates, Invisible Boy ... and now, Captain Clothes Pins are missing! WHO WILL SAVE US NOW?

Chief Justice, Wonder Boy, Captain Everything, Robby Rocket Pants, Utility Belt, Shojo Shaman, Smash Samson, Dream Dust Debbie, Tie Dye Tina, Betty Butterfly

Using an infrared geological camera from his Utility Belt, Utility Belt leads the heroes to a seismic fissure near the Airport. Then Betty Butterfly lets Charlie, the Magic Purple Butterfly, loose to soar and flap around, eventually dipping into a vent in the Earth.

And what does Charlie discover? A fantastic hollow cave in the Earth roofed with amethysts, floored with Technicolor yellow moss, and filled with faceless stone creatures who are patiently feeding, tending, and exercising a whole herd of open-range baby Rockworms!

“Rockworms!” shouts Captain Everything, this week’s new member of the Justice Seeking Vigilantes of Justice. “Get behind me! I’ll use my Rockworm-cloaking powers to hide us!”

“You. Have Rockworm cloaking powers,” says Smash Samson. “Well, all right, brother! Hey, Rockworms! **Whatcha gonna do?**”

“They can still hear us,” Captain Everything says.

“Aw,” says Smash, as Rockworms in plenitude come a-slithering towards him.

“I’ll draw them off, guys! And chicks,” says Smash, with a bow in the direction of Shojo Shaman and the Flower Power Girls. “You get to the super-dudes and tag-team them outta here!”

With a last pass of his hands through his flowing locks, Smash Samson seized two handfuls of tank top shirt and slowly tore it apart, revealing massive oiled muscles.

The Rockworms close in.

“Go on!” Smash insists. “I’ve GOT this!”

Reluctantly, the other heroes sneak deeper into the cave complex, hearing whooping sounds and rock slamming against rock behind them.

“Holy Leonidas!” exclaimed Wonder Boy, smacking his gloved fist into his palm. “He sacrificed himself for us --- and the heroes we came to save!”

“Speak only this of him,” said Captain Everything slowly and sonorously. “That here, in obedience to the law, he lies.”

“Gosh, Captain Everything!” said Wonder Boy.

A sneering, snorting, echoing laughter arose all around them.

“My Rockworm pets can’t see you, FOOLS!” said the voice. “But that’s the one thing I love about superheroes – they just don’t know when to SHUT UP!”

Spotlights flicked on, instantly dimming into blackness. Then they dimmed further, soaking the light out of the air until they were shining beams of pure-black darkness into the already gloomy cave. As the spotlights were focused on them, Shojo Shaman exclaimed in horror.

“I’m all black and white!” she said. “Oh no! I’ve heard about what happens in manga!”

“At least we’re all equally blind now,” said Robby Rocket Pants.

“Again, FOOLS!” shouted the darkness. “For what is dark to you is light to me! You have dared to challenge the domain of the UNDERMINER! I am always beneath you, but nothing is beneath me! And now, led by my underground darkness vision, my Rockworms will render you fit for paving a very smooth driveway!”

“Split up!” said Dream Dust Debbie. “Don’t let them surround us!”

“Fly, Charlie! Soar up and seek the light!” said Betty Butterfly. She released a torrent of butterflies, who would have been very colorful without all the darkness, and the giant purple butterfly Charlie soared light-heartedly to the roof of the cave, where he flitted contentedly among the stalactites.

Chief Justice gave his Supreme Court war cry, “Stare decisis!” and leapt into the fray, brandishing a war-tomahawk-gavel. The Rockworm toward which he soared humped itself into a ball, then exhaled a hurricane of dirt and dust, blinding the Chief and causing him to miss his gavel-strike. The blinded, but unbowed, Chief lunged forward into the fray, right into a big rock, and fell down.

Wonder Boy flourished his Wand of Wonder, and lightning somehow struck underground, shattering rocks on every side. He still couldn’t see anything, but he could feel the Rockworm grab hold of his shoe! So he aimed the Wand at his foot and waved it, blowing the Rockworm to pieces after first freezing it solid. Wonder Boy carefully poked at his icy shoe, which crumbled away, revealing a perfectly healthy foot. Whew!

Captain Everything concentrated his Everything Vision on the Rockworm, hitting it with heat, cold, light, darkness, red, blue, green, pressure, traction, wind, fire, water, earth, a tornado, another tornado rotating in the other direction, x-rays, radio waves, microwaves, refrigerators, sound, silence, gas, solids, vacuum, density, gravity, anti-gravity, space, anti-space, time, anti-time, fury and tranquility, all at the same time!

The Rockworm only hit Captain Everything with one thing: rocks. So judged on creativity and variety, clearly Captain Everything was the winner. Judged on consciousness, though, both of them lost.

Robby Rocket Pants zoomed around the narrow confines of the cave, darting in and out of the Underminer's darkness beams. When he could see a Rockworm, he avoided it, trying to angle toward the Underminer crouching in the shadows. And when he couldn't see anything, he put his arms over his face and tried to avoid the floor. His rocket exhaust passed over a Rockworm, flipped it over, then shook loose a huge overhanging rock that landed on the Rockworm with a satisfying *thwack!*

Utility Belt takes out a bulletproof Bat-Shield which is transparent, so the hero can see through it. However, that presupposes some light, to say nothing of actively light-absorbing phenomena such as the Underminer's Darklights. Had the Rockworm attacked him from the front, the shield would have been just dandy. As it was, however, the Rockworm attacked from behind.

Shojo Shaman gestures at the Rockworm. "Power of the Moon, shine through this darkness and Unfold the Terror Rainbow of Saturn!"

Moonlight shone down through a sudden hole in the cave overhead, fractionating into seven distinctly colored rays, each of which transformed into a different horrifying nightmare monster: a red mecha-alligator, an orange zombie leopard, a yellow razor-spider, and so on. Rockworms have limited emotional lives, but they do have a sense of fear. And that sense of fear got very badly abused this day. The Rockworm in question fled down a crack so narrow that its rock armor peeled off, revealing the worm's inner core of flexible lava muscles. But they weren't revealed for long, because this worm was most definitely Outta Here.

Dream Dust Debbie couldn't see any of the Rockworms, but she could hear them. So she flicked dream dust off her fingertips in their general direction, and when that didn't seem to help, threw the whole bag of dust after it. She heard the noise Rockworms make when they're having raging hallucinations – you know the noise – and clapped her hands excitedly.

"Yay! Take THAT, rocktopus!" Then the dust on her hands got into her nostrils, and then she felt very strange indeed. A prince rode down a rainbow on a unicorn, a pirate captain dove into a clear orange sea, a dashing highwayman lowered his mask to reveal another mask, and then it got weird.

Tie Dye Tina puts her best foot forward, planting it right in a Rockworm's side. But its shell was too hard for her sandal to put a dent in. The Rockworm lashed its tail (in other words, most of its body) against Tina, knocking her sprawling.

Betty Butterfly shakes her long belled sleeves, shaking out more and more butterflies. How many, you ask? Enough to lift a Rockworm into the air, that's how many! Rockworms, a burrowing, crawling breed, really really don't like being up in the air. So the butterflies let him go! Friendly butterflies. Crunch.

The four surviving Rockworms start dragging Chief Justice, Tie Dye Tina, Utility Belt, and Captain Everything away into their underground lair, but then Robby Rocket Pants spots the Underminer and points out where he is to everyone else! The Underminer shrieks, calls all his Rockworms to him, and has them tunnel through solid rock, carrying him away under the Earth.

“I’ll get him!” says the Rocket-Propelled Boy.

“No! This way – it’s where the Rockworms were carrying our unconscious friends!” says Betty Butterfly.

“But he’ll GET AWAY!” shouts Robby Rocket Pants.

“Are we here to get the Underminer?” said Betty. “Or are we here to find the missing heroes? That’s the cause that Smash Samson sacrificed himself for.”

“Gosh, she’s right!” said Wonder Boy. “If we don’t find the heroes, Smash’s sacrifice will be for nothing!”

Robby Rocket Pants was sure he could have caught the Underminer, but he gave in to Wonder Boy’s certainty.

The remaining heroes went down a wide tunnel into a cave full of treasure – gold bars, stop signs, shiny cars, sewer pipes, and other products of the upper world stolen by the Underminer. They also found several of the eyeless yellow Stone Men, each one patiently gripping a superhero by the wrists.

“I know how to deal with these guys!” chirped Shojo Shaman. “Five-Card Water and Fire Combination Love Smile of Enlightenment!”

The Stone Men all smile as they are whirled about by fire and swept away by water. For the first time, they understand it all.

“That always works,” she said.

Lying on the stony floor, slowly waking up, were Super Strategist, Admiral America, Professor Socrates, Johnathan Harker Jr., Captain Clothes Pins, and Invisible Boy.

“It was the Underminer,” said Admiral America. “He wanted to capture the city’s defenders before he began his attack. Fortunately, Professor Socrates got him monologuing ...”

“Does that seem like a difficult thing to do?” asked the Professor enigmatically.

“... and he just went on and on for hours, stopping only to eat and sleep. We didn’t get a lot of details, but we’re exhaustively sure of two things: he hasn’t begun his attack on Champion City yet, and he’s extremely confident it will succeed.”

“I have a plan,” said Super Strategist, straightening his domino mask and tricorne hat. “But I’ll need a briefing on the current situation.”

“There’ll be time for that later!” exclaimed Captain Clothes Pins. “Come on, let’s bust out of here and summon the Fabulous Four!”

He whipped out a Razor-Ripper Clothes Pin and threw it wildly. Everyone ducked or leapt aside. The razor-ripper razor-ripped through the soil and stone overhead, digging a tunnel to the surface the exact width of a clothes pin. Sunlight poked down through the hole, along with a hint of fresh air.

“We can go out the way we came in!” said Betty Butterfly. “Maybe we can still rescue poor Smash ...”

“If this is the holding area, the Rockworms will bring Smash Samson here when they defeat him,” said Super Strategist. “All we have to do is wait.”

They waited.

“This sure is taking a long time,” said Robby Rocket Pants. “I’ll go see what the holdup is!”

“Robby, no! It’s too dangerous!” said everyone, but he was gone. No one ever listens when you say it’s too dangerous.

Robby found Smash Samson tugging three Rockworms into a complicated knot. The Rockworms flailed, but were unable to escape.

“Stubborn, aintcha?” Smash boomed. “Just tap out and we’ll call it quits.”

“They don’t have hands, ye blond git,” said Gene Hunt from the other side of the cave, where he was covering some cowering baby Rockworms with his revolve. “Gi’im a snoutful o’ Sam Colt, though, an’ they’re gentle as bluidy lambs.” He snorted derisively. “Bluidy OGLY lambs.”

“Smash! You’re alive!” said Betty.

“Alive and in color, baby! Ain’t no Rockworm ever made can overpower a tidal wave of Smashomania!”

“Ploos, I got here in the nick of to keep the bluidy worms from overrunnin’ this prat,” said Gene Hunt. “Ay, where’s Tina? Tina, ‘veye hoort yeself?”

“I’m okay, Mr. Hunt ... a rock hit me,” said Tina woozily.

“Well, it’s too late for you gels to be out oonder the streets anyway,” said Hunt. “Right, off to the van wi’you all.”

Missing Heroes RESCUED!

Justice Seeking Justice Vigilantes of Justice For Justice: +5 Fame

Shojo Shaman and the BACKUPS: +1 Fame

Groovy Flower Power Girls: +3 Fame

Global Grappling All-Stars: +1 Fame

Chief Justice 2 xp

Wonder Boy 3 xp

Captain Everything 3 xp

Robby Rocket Pants 3 xp

Utility Belt 2 xp

Shojo Shaman 3 xp

Smash Samson 3 xp

Dream Dust Debbie 3 xp

Tie Dye Tina 2 xp

Betty Butterfly 3 xp

TIME FOR A BEER PARTY!

Nathan Ale, the Patriotic Party Animal, wants Champion City to throw all its weak, flat American beer into the harbor! And there's all these guys dressed up as Indians ...

Baen Books, Bag Lady

“So, this is the Beer Party?” said John Ringo of Baen Books. “Seems kinda slow ...”

There were a lot of guys standing around in Indian costumes, but there didn't seem to be any beer. Over on the next wharf, Godzilla was trampling a warehouse, but over here it was deadly dull.

“Yee-haw!” shouted a man in red, white, blue and sudsy gold. “Let's get this Beer Party started!”

“There's a cue,” said Lois McMaster Bujold.

“My name is Nathan Ale!” shouted the man whose name was Nathan Ale. “I'm the Party Patriot, the Minuteman of Milwaukee, the Guerilla of Guinness, and I am SICK and TIRED of beer so weak it couldn't outwrestle a Congressman's backbone! Can you feel me?”

“Yeah!” shouted all the guys dressed like Indians.

“Then let's get rid of all this NEAR-BEER!” he enthused. “We could go down into the hold of this ship and carry the beer up to the deck a case at a time, then throw it overboard. But I have a much better idea!”

He hefted a device looking like a long fiberglass pipe with a keg on the end.

“We'll just use my BeerZooka here to blow the side off the ship and let the beer mingle with the water it so closely resembles!”

“Waste of good river water,” grumbled Bag Lady. She rummaged in her bag for something.

“I've heard enough, too,” said David Weber. “We'd better grab him from the sides – you don't want to be in front of OR behind that bazooka. Looks like a recoilless rifle more than a rocket launcher – the backblast can ruin your entire day.”

“What's the difference?” asked Bujold.

“A rocket continues to burn once you launch it,” Weber said. “Doesn't reach top speed for several seconds. A recoilless rifle burns all its propellant in the tube. Goes a lot faster right out of the gate, but the backblast is proportionally magnified.”

Bag Lady came up with a paper bag from her bag.

She shook out the bag, again and again, and with each series of folds she shook out, it flapped larger and larger. Soon the bag was flapping all over Bag Lady and her friends.

Ringo and Weber rushed Nathan Ale from either side. Several of his Indian-garbed Beer Buds, however, intercepted them. Ringo was able to throw one over his shoulder, while Weber quickfooted between two of them without ever *quite* getting grabbed.

Neither, however, was able to grab Nathan Ale before he launched the BeerZooka.

A missile the size of a pony keg looped toward the ship. Bag Lady unfurled her brown paper bag between them, and the missile sailed inside.

It didn't come out the other end.

Inside the bag there was a distant pop, as though something had exploded far, far away. Miles away, perhaps, in the fathomless interior of the bag.

Nathan Ale's jaw dropped open. Ringo shut it for him with his fist.

"Now, who wants to join him?" Ringo demanded of the Beer Patriots.

Over half of them didn't want any part of this fight any more. The other half, however, did. There were a lot of them. And they all had glass bottles.

"Places it would be nice to have a suit of nanomolecular armor," said Weber. "Second in a series."

Bujold joined them, brandishing a fencing saber. Only an idiot would come within reach of three feet of sharp steel, so naturally she had a lot of work to do, because the Beer Patriots were pre-selected for idiocy.

Bag Lady poured orange rinds from her bag. They stuck to the Beer Patriots's shoes and made them slippery. For every one that fell down, another decided he wasn't sufficiently into Beer Purity to risk falling on his face.

Eventually, the heroes beat up about a sixth of the Beer Patriots, in such a manner that the other five-sixths became discouraged and left.

"We sure are lucky you were here, Bag Lady," said Bujold. "What all do you have in that bag of yours, anyway?"

"Wind! Fire! All that kind of thing!" she exclaimed.

And everybody laughed.

Nathan Ale DEFEATED!

Baen Books +4 Fortune

Shojo Shaman and the BACKUPS: +2 Fortune

Bag Lady and Baen Books: 3 xp each.

ROCKWORM TIMES THREE!

Rockworms erupt in Shadow Hill! Now there are three of them, even larger and more thickly armored than the last one --- and they're eating everything made of brick, stone or metal! Fortunately the graceful Georgian homes of stately Shadow Hill are unaffected, except for their wrought-iron railings.

Don't Quit Your Day Job Players, Graffiti Guru

Weasel Bag was all out of Cheer, and his Chill Weasel was feeling feverish, by the time the Novelator and Bongo Drummer Boy arrived.

"Okay, so I was starting to think I was going to have to beat these things all by myself," he complained. "And the last time that happened, I got swallowed, and there was only ONE of them!"

"Chill out!" said Bongo Drummer Boy, riffing on his drums. "We're here now."

"Fate, or destiny, or some unsuspected organizing force of the universe, clearly intends for the rockworm on the right to be our first target," declared the Novelator.

Indeed, the rockworm in question did have "HIT ME" in huge orange letters sprayed on its fore end, which may indeed have been a sign from Above.

Graffiti Guru, on a rooftop above, shook his spray cans soberly.

"Not enough propellant ... yet! Still ... sober!" he said, and unleashed another blast of day-glo freestyle.

The Rockworm with the orange paint, now clearly distinguishable from all others, reared up and head-butted the apartment complex on which Graffiti Guru stood, then started twining its stone-slabbed bulk up the sides to get at him. In the process, its head became green, purple, gold, and a really lovely shade of turquoise, one after the other. Subtle layering and shading effects became visible.

The rockworm cleared its throat and spat, a sound like a cement mixer drinking rocks. Colored debris splattered the street.

"Now, Bongo! Now's your time! (Duke of Wellington, June 1815)" said the Novelator, remembering to give credit where credit was due.

Bongo Drummer Boy bounded to the attack, drumming really really fast on the Rockworm's stony, paint-decorated surface. Colored wafts of sparkling dust flew off, forming flower shapes in the air.

"How about you?" demanded Weasel Boy. "I'm spicing his taste buds halfway to Tijuana, but what are you accomplishing?"

“I’m the brains, my weasel-loving compatriot,” said the Novelator grandly. “I got Bongo Drummer Boy here in the first place. Thus speaks ... the NOVELATOR!”

Weasel Bag still seemed peeved, so the Novelator gave him a puff of Cheer Weasel. He perked right up.

“Aw right! Time to get wiggly on these rock-knockers!”

And he took a weasel in each hand and jumped in, swinging. The other two weasels found an abandoned ice cream cone and fought over it. Angel Weasel won.

Weasel Bag flailed weaselistically on the rockworm until it fell limp, just as it was about to reach the roof. Graffiti Guru exhaled in relief.

“Thanks, I thought he was gonna OHMIGOD LOOK OUT!”

Another Rockworm was lunging, falling forward toward Weasel Bag. The Novelator tried describing it into submission.

“Arcing over the dusty tenement roofs, the rugose planarity that was the Rockworm asserted its subterranean supremacy, pantomiming a threat display like some hominid out of the mists of prehistory toward the embattled Don’t Quit Your Day Job Players. But – ow!”

Avalanching bricks cut short the Novelator in mid-paragraph. So it goes.

The third and (with luck!) final Rockworm dove headfirst into the pavement and was gone.

“Yay! We scared him away!” said Bongo Drummer Boy. He struck up a victory theme on the head of the second Rockworm. With a little bit of Ultra-Matte Camo Green, the second Rockworm joined the first in sprawling linearly across the metropolis.

“I don’t think –“ said Weasel Bag, fully intending to revise and extend his remarks immediately thereafter. Unfortunately, the apartment building lurched and fell forward at an angle, dropping him and Graffiti Guru into a garbage-choked alley.

The apartments, unable to sustain the strain of repeated shifting, collapsed into heaps of brick and broken furniture. The third Rockworm, having undermined the structure from below, reared up, spitting broken pieces of foundation. But Weasel Bag was too quick for it, and readied his Spice Weasel for a knockout BAM!

“Now!” he shouted to Graffiti Guru, who painted the worm’s face white and purple.

The Rockworm opened its mouth to cough the paint away, and Weasel Bag kicked it up a whole bunch of notches by pumping the Spice Weasel’s tail like a trombone full of jalapeno sauce!

Shojo Shaman and the BACKUPS: 4 exp. +1 Fame and Fortune and Luck
Don't Quit Your Day Job Players: 12 exp. +2 Fame and Fortune and Luck

THE TERROR THAT IS SARCASTRO!

He's the snarkiest Cuban dictator you ever saw ... and you've got a very good chance to arrest him! Yeah, right ... like you're even a superhero ...

Serge the Colossal, "Manic Man"

"It's time, yeah! You're going down! Yeah!" said "Manic Man" Jamie Wild. "Hey, Sarcastro – you ready to taste the PAIIIIIIIN?"

"Does it taste like chicken? Cause they say everything tastes like chicken," Sarcastro replied.

"Wait. What?"

"Oh, look, everybody! It's trying to think!" Sarcastro said.

"I think he is try to rattle you, Jamie," said Serge the Colossal reassuringly. "He is trying to play a head game with Jamie the Body."

"That's another guy, man! Yeah!"

"Oh, no! Professional wrestlers!" Sarcastro said. "And me without a folding chair? What am I gonna do now?"

"That is a very good question, evil Cuban man."

"Because everyone knows, there's absolutely no defense against strong guys wearing leotards!" Sarcastro was on a roll. "And there hasn't been since, oh, the Stone Age! What ever shall I ... wait ... what's that, Mister Gun? You have an idea? A forty-five caliber idea?"

"Oh-oh," said Serge.

"Mister Gun says he's got a wrestling hold for you, Panic Man Baby Child! It's called a –"

"PANIC Man BABY CHILD?" said Manic Man, clearly on the edge of apoplexy. His voice was higher than a steam whistle.

"Three puns on one name," said Serge. "It really is a crying shame. To grapple someone very clever, and slam his face into the leather."

"You yoyos really have forgotten I have a gun, haven't you?" said Sarcastro. "Even in a world where guys throw lightning outta their noses, you two are miracles of science! How do you even manage to walk in the rain without drowning?"

"Jamie's hair oil repels water," said Serge helpfully.

"It's too late for panic, baby! Whaaaaaat's UUUUUP!" yelled the Manic Man in mid-air.

“Not your IQ,” Sarcastro said. “Gun, remember?”

Jamie Wild landed on Sarcastro. There was a flurry of shots. Then the dust cleared and he was tucking Sarcastro’s left foot into his right ear – a bad fit.

”Slap leather!” Jamie demanded.

“Yeah, right! Like I’m gonna surrender to you!” Sarcastro shot back.

“Jamie, don’t let him up!” shouted Serge from the sidelines. “He doesn’t mean it!”

“You’re the brains of the outfit, aren’t you, Frenchy?”

Suddenly, an iron hand in an iron glove reached down toward Sarcastro.

“Take my hand, brother of the proletariat!” said Stalin Grad, who wasn’t even supposed to be here.

Sarcastro slapped Stalin Grad’s hand, and Stalin Grad slapped Jamie Wild’s head. The iron gloves helped a lot here.

“Ow! I did NOT see that coming!” exclaimed the Manic Man. He reeled backward, tripping over Sarcastro’s boots. “Nobody’s ever run into a wrestling match unannounced before, turning victory into seemingly certain defeat!”

“Great. Now everybody wants to get into the act,” Sarcastro complained.

Stalin Grad followed up, slapping Jamie left and right with iron gloves. As Jamie went down for the third time, an iron boot pinned his shoulder to the ground.

“Serves you right for standing in the victorious path of the workers!” said Stalin Grad. “One ... two ...”

Serge the Colossal stepped up and held his hand under Jamie Wild’s. Jamie slapped it.

“Tree”, said Serge, picking Stalin Grad up and hurling him over the horizon.

“I should have brought my army of hooligan wreckerrrrrsss ...” said the would-be tyrant as he faded into the distance.

Serge turned to face Sarcastro. Sarcastro sneered.

“Shyeah, right. Like I’m gonna fight you,” he said, then ran for it.

“Quick, Jamie, he’s escaping! Give me a folding chair or something!”

“Whew .. lemme catch my ... breath here, Serge ...”

“No time, good buddy! Time for Tag Team Teamwork!”

“Well, yeah, sure –“

Serge hefted Jamie once, twice, juggled him for balance, and hurled him into the distance.

WHUD!

“I’m all right,” said Sarcastro, and crumpled to the ground.

“Even to the end sarcastic!” Serge observed. “I think that gun was made of plastic.”

“I don’t think so,” said Jamie Wild, panting heavily. “Uh, little help?”

Sarcastro DEFEATED!

(Special Guest Villain Stalin Grad ESCAPED with minor injuries!)

Serge the Colossal: 4 experience

Manic Man Jamie Wild: 4 experience

Global Grappling All-Stars: +4 Luck

Meanwhile ...

Bongo Drummer Boy and Dream Dust Debbie don't quite make it to the gig on time. But then the Novelator lights a herbal candle, and follows the sparkling trail of Dream Dust to a quiet sidewalk café, where Bongo Drummer Boy has joined the house band in jamming the classics! So they do make it to the adventure ... eventually.

Previously in Mystery Men ... the Super Squadron

Daisuke Mifune, also known as "Pops" Racecar, his huge arms folded over his brawny chest and massive belly, cap pulled low on his head and oil stains shining on his overalls, stood in the front door of the little split level suburban home which served as the workshop and headquarters of Racecar Motors, the stubbornly independent yet spunky family business.

Sprawled on the lawn before him were the limp forms of Bill Gates of California and Doctor Doom of Latveria. "GET OUT!" thundered Pops. "I am not selling my motor business for any amount of money! Not to no one, not no how!"

Doctor Doom's gyroscopic carbon-titanium smart-armor righted itself with a hum of his atomic strength-amplification motors. "Now, then, be reasonable, sir. I represent a prestigious consortium you might find it to your advantage to..."

"Curse you, Pops Fast!" shrieked Bill Gates, waving a threatening, if somewhat small and veiny, fist in the direction of the large and ectomorphic form of the master mechanic. "You have thwarted me for now! But I solemnly swear you will pay for my defeat! If I cannot purchase your stubbornly independent yet spunky motor of revolutionary design, I will use my vast wealth to gather the Superhighway Race Car League of Outrageous Vehicles against you! And no one in your family will ever win a race again! Beware my vengeance!"

"Well," said Doctor Doom mildly, brushing some grassblades off his voluminous green cape, "Come to think of it, I could have my ultrastratospheric superdreadnought direct a robot-controlled nuclear warhead at this area of Japan, and wipe out the whole countryside. I also have a time machine. I urge you to reconsider our lucrative offer, Pops..."

His eyes narrowed in dark and brooding anger, his teeth clenched, and a cold aura of offended majesty radiated from him. "No one talks to me that way in my suburban yard! The last time anyone DARED speak that way was the day my beloved son Rex Racecar died! You should not have made me angry!" And, using his vast muscles and vast skills as the only living remaining practitioner of Japanese Style Greco-Roman Wrestling, he picked up Doctor Doom by the ankles and clobbered the still snarling and moustache-twirling villain, Bill Gates, with him. "And STAY out!" He called after their retreating forms.

Aya Mifune, affectionately known as Mom Racecar, appeared in the doorway, peering over her husband's brawny shoulder. She was wearing a pearl necklace, a frilly apron, and was polishing a china plate. "Was that that J.K. Rowling woman again? Or was it the Queen of England, again? You could tell her we do not need her money without actually punching her in the face, you know. I don't want you setting a bad example for Chim-Chim."

"No," grunted Pops with a massive shrug. "It was the head of state of some other nation, this time from Eastern Europe. With the Head of State World Rally coming up, all these monarchs and presidents and dictators of World Powers are desperate for a lightweight but powerful and spunky engine. Little do they realize that I have placed the irreplaceable plans in the one place that is completely safe: I draw the motor blueprints in invisible ink mixed with lemon juice on the windshield of the experimental super-car I built for my son, Fast Racer."

While the two were talking, Michi Shimura, daughter of the wealthy Mr Shimura of Shimura aircraft company, nicknamed Trixie (the daughter, not the father) landed in her cute pink helicopter in an uproarious roar of downwash, and came skipping over to join the conversation. She drew off the heavy aircraft helmet she wore and flipped her short, spunky hair, which she wore in a pageboy bob, and for some reason gave a wink through the fourth wall at the nonexistent viewing audience.

"Hi, Pops! What secret thing are you discussing?" she burred with irrepressible cheerfulness.

Pops growled, "The fact that every world leader from Putin to the King of Magical Australia has been dropping by my house trying to beg, borrow, or threaten the secret of my super motor out of me! They all want it for the Head of State World Rally! But I have cleverly hidden the plans by drawing them in visible ink on my son's racecar!"

She blinked her overly-large yet charming eyes. "But — that car is constantly exposed to glass-smashing danger, from thrown gravel to machinegun bullets to laser beams fired by evil racecar driving cyborgs dressed as scarecrows or something. As absurdly dangerous as racecar driving is, he has now taken up superhero crimefighting, which is even more absurdly dangerous!"

Pops nodded grimly. "While it is true Fast Racer has recently taken up superhero vigilante work, which is absurdly dangerous, nonetheless, I have forbidden him to do any more superheroing, and he is not allowed to race in any more races. He is not experienced enough to race in the big leagues. So, by comic book logic, no industrial spy or racecar motor plans thief will ever think to look at the windshield of a car that is certain to be involved in car-wrecks and car-dogfights and car-gunfights! But they do not know that I have **FORBIDDEN** Fast to leave the house, making the windshield perfectly safe! Any questions?"

Michi said, "Why are you standing in the front yard? If the Mock Mach Macht Schnell is safely in the garage, why is the garage door open and the car missing?"

"I have a question," said Mom Racecar. "Why is it that our last name is 'Racecar' whereas his is 'Racer'?"

Just at that moment, Kurio Mifune, sometimes called Spritely, appeared in the doorway, peering outward to see what the confusion was. He was sucking a lollipop, and was dressed in a baseball cap, striped shirt, and red overalls.

With him was a freakish miniature apelike being of his same size and shape, also dressed in a baseball cap, striped shirt, and red overalls. The monkey was also carrying and licking a lollipop.

"I have a question!" chimed in the adorable if odd eight year old, "Why does a freakish apelike being who looks and dressed exactly like me live in our house, eat at the kitchen table with us, and sleep in my bed?"

Mom Racecar silently decided now was not the time to explain about her past indiscretions with Gorilla Grodd of Ape City, or the nature of Soviet biologist Ilya Ivanovich Ivanov's controversial experiments on creating human-ape hybrids.

Just at that moment, Sabu, affectionately nicknamed 'Sparky', the comedy relief sidekick and engineer who for some reason lived at the Mifune household, stuck his head around the door. He was wearing greasy overalls and a baseball cap on backward with a monkeywrench protruding from his overall pockets, just in case it was not clear that he was an engineer. "I have a question! Why do I live at your house? Do I have a last name?"

Just at that moment, the shining white length of the Mock Mach Macht Schnell, motors purring like a kitten and roaring like a lion, sped down the road like a glance of lightning, and with a squeal of tires, pulled into the driveway in a cloud of blue smoke.

"So," said Michi, blinking. "Fast Racer ignored your commands and decided to go racecar driving anyway, or go fight crime as a superhero? That would seem to be a weak spot in your plan, considering that he disobeys your comically overbearing commands just about every three episodes or so."

Pop's face turned red as a beat under a spotlight at sunset covered in catsup. Steam leaked from his ears. "FAAAAST!"

Unexpectedly, from behind him, came Fast Racer, Go Mifune, dressed in blue pajamas and wearing a red scarf. His Elvis style pompadour was mussed, and he was yawning. "What's up Pops?"

Pops blinked at him, then at the figure which emerged from the motorcar. Mom Racecar said sweetly, "Your father wanted to upbraid you for sneaking out to do race car vigilante work. You were seen fighting the evil Stonecutters along with—I think—a man dressed like Santa Claus and another man in a Barrel? It was in the news. "

Fast had a look on his face that can only be described as slow. "But—I was home, taking a week-long shower and a nap."

Michi exclaimed, "But is Fast Racer actually NOT Go Mifune in disguise? That was the lamest superhero disguise ever! Everyone knows Fast Racer is Go Mifune! He did not even take a secret identity as a dis-ad!"

Fast Racer looked nervous. "You're just kidding, right? You guys don't actually know that I am secretly the superhero Fast Racer?"

"We all know," said Michi, Pops, Mom, Spritely, and Sparky in unison. "Ook! Ook!" observed the monkey.

"But wait!" said Spritely, "If Fast Racer is HERE — then who is that THERE?!"

For a moment, a tall and ominous silhouette loomed in the cloud. The blue smoke from the tailpipe of the Mock Mach Macht Schnell finally cleared away. There was a man dressed in Fast Racer's signature jacket, but his face was covered by a black hood adorned with a large white X.

"Ook! AWK!" exclaimed the monkey in surprise.

"It is Chauffeur X! THE HARBINGER OF BOOM!" shrieked Spritely. "RUN!" Chauffeur X, that mysterious figure who haunts race car driving circuits, periodically smashing car-napping crime rings and fighting evil racecar driving cyborgs dressed as scarecrows or something, was well known for his reckless but bold and fearless style of driving. He was also the chauffeur of the White House Limo for the President of the United States, James Norcross.

"It is I, Chauffeur X," intoned Chauffeur X. "I am sorry, Fast, but I had to borrow your car and assume your identity to stop the Stonecutters gang. While their activities have nothing whatsoever to do with car racing, the International Outrageous Vehicle Automotive Racing Association's international secret police division head, Inspector Detector, asked me to look into it."

Fast said in confused anger and angry confusion, "Hold it! You stole my car? Is that not a crime?"

Chauffeur X nodded to another man, who emerged from the racecar. It was a guy in a hat.

"My name is Inspector Detector. As you know, according to comic book logic, international car racing is perfectly within its right to have a special secret police force to stop race car crimes. And, by comic book logic, our

undercover officers are allowed to steal your car without permission, and do anything else required when the writer is feeling lazy, to keep the plot moving."

Michi said, "Is this sort of like the International Secret Police squad that Marineboy and Aqualad serve on, to help stop whale-related crimes? That makes sense! We LIKE comic book logic!"

"Exactly!" said the secret police inspector of the international car-crime organization. "For the same reason, we secret police officers approach civilians on the front lawn of their suburban homes, and ask them to join us in dangerous suicide missions, even though, from a legal point of view, sending a civilian into harm's way, especially one with no training in police work, is dubious."

Chauffeur X said, "What Inspector Detector is telling you, Fast, is that the Man Eating Cow is missing. The supervillain Bombastro is attempting to organize all the street gangs of Champion City into a powerful force for evil."

"Glork! Glork!" intimated the monkey knowingly.

"Wait a moment!" Chimed in the eight year old, who, as was only proper for comic logic, was part of the conversation about police work and spies taking place among adults. "Are we talking about the Champion City in Latveria, or the other one?"

Inspector Detector shook his head. "No. The Latverian version is a lifesized mock up peopled entirely by robots. We are sure Dr Doom has constructed it for some legitimate and peaceful use."

Pops looked annoyed. "Which Champion City is the other one? Not the one in Argentina?"

Spritely spoke up. "Champion City is part of New Delaware, which is the 57th state of the United States of America, on the continent of North America, in the Western Hemisphere. The chief export of Champion City is fermented footwear, now that the downtown district lost the Baryon-Barium Distillation Plant which one employed thousands. The local school curling team, the Baryon-Barium Barons, came in first in the regionals. There are rumors that the evil sports villain Sportsmaster interfered with the judging in the event."

Michi said, "And ... we live in Japan. Why should we be concerned with street gang violence there?"

Inspector Detector said, "We are afraid that Bombastro may branch out to street racing, in which case, the illegal cars used may not be safe."

Fast Racer said, "But—do you have any evidence that Bombastro even drives a car? All the newspaper said is that he said CAN YOU DIG IT?"

Inspector Detector said grimly, "While we have no evidence whatsoever that there is any street racing involved, I did see the movie The Fast and the Furious 3: Tokyo Drift last week, and so there may be a connection between street racing and smuggling."

Fast Racer said, "What kind of smuggling? And wouldn't that be a matter for the American police?"

Inspector Detector said, "Not if it was time travelers from the mutant-infected world of the far future back into our segment of the time stream!"

Fast Racer stood blinking in confusion. "And—is it time travelers from the mutant-infected world of the far future back into our segment of the time stream?"

Inspector Detector said, "I have no idea what kind of craziness Steve Johnson might come up with. But YOU, Fast Racer, are the only man with the particular skills who is in the right place and time to run in Bombastro's evil backstreet race car rally, and save the Man Eating Cow!"

Fast Racer said, "I don't know. I think my Pops wants me to stay home. Besides, there is a world racing rally with all the world leaders later this week, being held on Danger Island, or Ape Island, or Robot Island, I forget which, and..."

Chauffeur X said, "I hate to say this to you, Fast Racer, but you have no choice. This—" and he pulled out an official document signed with the Great Seal of the United States, "—is your draft notice. The President himself signed it! You are now a member of the International Secret Police, Special Motorized Car Crimes Division!"

Michi said, "Wait a minute. Even by comic logic, that makes no sense. Go Mifune is a subject of Japan, not an American citizen. And the President cannot just draft people, and, even if he could, he cannot make them join international secret organizations. Can he?"

Chauffeur X said, "He can if he first passes a law saying he can!"

Mich said to Spritely, "You've studied American history in school. Can the President pass laws all by himself, without their Congress?"

Spritely nodded, "In comic book logic, that is the way it works. The President can bypass Congress if he has a pen and a phone. Or, at least presidents who work by comic book logic can."

Pops said grimly, "Fast!"

Fast Racer said, "My name is actually Go Mifune, father..."

"Fast!" continued Pops, speaking over him, "I do not want you to go into danger, but you have been drafted by a piece of paper written in a language we cannot read, and, so, by comic logic, you must go!"

After Fast had driven off in a swirl of blue smoke, and used his jumping jack-pistons to drive over the neighbor's houses, Mom Racecar turned suddenly to Pops, "Why, Oh why did you not tell him about the secret plans inscribed in invisible ink on his windshield!"

Pops shook his head curtly and said in heavy sorrow, "I dare not! If he knew those precious and irreplaceable plans were there, he might get nervous, and lose the race! And then Bombastro might get away! And what would happen to the Man Eating Cow?"

Mom said, "That is the stupidest thing I ever heard. What if the windshield gets smashed?"

Pops said, "It will be alright. I have them all memorized in my head, with perfect photographic memory, so smashing the windshield can take place at a dramatic moment to prevent the industrial spies and motor engine thieves from getting the plans!"

Mom said, "But logically, that means that not only are the plans are NOT irreplaceable, there is no reason whatsoever to write them down anywhere, much less in invisible ink on a windshield except to lure thieves into attacking our son for no conceivable reason. Besides, what is not already established that the windshield is bulletproof and unbreakable? That makes no logical sense!"

Pops nodded sagely. "By logical rules of logic, you'd be right. But this is comic book world logic, so we are hoping the young readers will forget about that particular plot point before the climax."

Michi said, "But, Pops, how does comic book world logic differ from ordinary logic?"

Pops said, "It involves something called hypertime."

Just then, a motorcade of twenty motorcycles and five armored limousines pulled up in front of the house. James Norcross, President of the United States, stepped out of the last car.

"Pardon me, is this the Mifune residence? I am here to speak with Fas— I mean, with Go Mifune. He and I are not both members of any superhero team, nothing

like that. I just would like to speak to him, ah, in absolute privacy, um, about some innocuous topic..."

Pops grimaced at him. "As I told that last head of state who was here, I am NOT selling my motor!"

President Norcross did not reply, for Pops Racecar had punched him hard in the stomach, doubling him over.

Previously in Mystery Men ... Team? What Team?

“Ok. who are you?” said Kaman Rider Tokyo to the new girl.

“Hello I'm Sherry Von Wale, the Fox Spirit. Ring any bells?” the new gal said.

They will both at the Superheroes Super School Of Superheroing, a.k.a. Champion City High, along with the Outsiders and Shojo Shaman. The school is relatively normal. It has your standard mind controlling robots, evil steam punk guys, and its mascot is Cthulhu. Literally.

In class 2b, our hero, Kamen Rider Tokyo, is sitting next to the future Kaman Rider Pi.

Sherry says, “Tokyo, trust me this is gonna work. All I have to do is hit you, and you'll be able to talk to the demon in your head.”

“And why would I want to talk to him?” says Tokyo.

“Because ...”

Wop .

Tokyo finds himself in a weird room where the walls are covered in purple cracks and black and white images of his parents' deaths. Through these purple cracks, he's dragged. Then, he finds himself on a giant roulette wheel.

Kaman Rider Tokyo sees a giant humanoid thing with a cherry for its head.

The cherry-headed demon says, “Hello, human who walks the path of heaven, to rule over all. I am Bubble Bubble, the spirit that the people from the Ampire confused for you.”

A voice from nowhere, apparently, then says, “and I am Dracul, you sword's spirit”

A man dressed in medieval noble clothes is suddenly standing behind Tokyo with his back to him. Dracul then says, “Your next enemy is at the docks. His name is Bombastro. He is at

present the leader of all the gangs. We believe this is because the evil anime Empire—Ampire, if you will—is helping him.”

Bubble Bubble then says, “If you run into any trouble from the evil anime Empire, just have Sherry fight them off. Good luck.”

Tokyo then woke up and said to Sherry, “Come on, we gotta get going. We have a meeting with the gang lord”.

Meanwhile, the Lone Power Ranger is riding around in a completely titanium white housing district.

The Ranger, “Lambda, this place is awfully quiet, don't ya think.”

Lambda, “ Aye-aye-aye-aye! I think you're right.”

The Ranger “Whooooa.”

A mysterious woman then materializes right in front of them. It is the mysterious White Witch. White Witch, “He who rides the elements, if you wish to undo what has been done here, you must go to the docks. Then you will find Bombastro. Punch him.”

The Ranger “Okay, miss, thanks for the advice. Wait...who are you?”

White Witch “Don't you know me? I am the last hero who the media stuck into a team with you, during the battle of the King Cobra Dojo, remember?”

The Ranger “Oh yeah, your the gal who took out the tank with a kick, right?”

White Witch “Yes, that was me. Now go and take out Bombastro.”

Kaman Rider Godzilla: “Rawer.”

Godzilla translation: “Well now, those pesky nobles are all done firing at me. I can go back home to relax. I wonder what Gigan is doing.”

Meanwhile on Monster Island, Gigan is chanting an Evil ritual called: the Smmoning of The B-list Kaijudo monster.

Gigan: “rawer rawer rawer moon.”

Gigan's translation: “So come back from the grave, my spirit, and bring forth the smog monster MOON.”

Ghidorah: “Rawer.”

Ghidorah's translation: “I duth not get the last word. Why duth thou have the say moon?”

Gigan: “Rawer.”

Gigan's translation: “I duth not know myself. Ah, the smog monster has arisen again.”

Smog monster: "Rawer."

Smog monster's translation: "What shall thou hast me do?"

Gigan: "Rawer."

Gigan's translation: "Go to destroy Kaman Rider Godzilla."

Meanwhile, at *The Daily Fib*, Morris Von Gloryhound (aka the guy who first claimed that Tokyo, Lone Power Ranger, Godzilla, and the mysterious White Witch were a team) is at his desk, when he hears news that 3 out of the 4 members of the team he discover are going to the docks. He assumes that they are all going to fight Bombastro.

He thinks to himself the following: "I'm glad I discovered that team, because now I'm filthy rich, and the most famous reporter in the business. Those Kaman Rider are going to make me even richer."

Previously in Mystery Men ... The Groovy Flower Power Girls

In their one-room apartment over the diner, Tina, Debbie and Betty sort through their latest purchases in a haze of acetone fumes.

"Waiting on tables doesn't pay much, but it does buy some cool nail polish! Red Dynamo. What guy could resist?"

Betty coughs politely at first then in a less contained fashion as her lungs fill with the stench of presumed male attractors.

"Um, that's made from the same stuff they use to make dynamite. I wouldn't put it on my nails!"

"You're just ragging on me 'cos Bongo Drummer Boy hasn't called you back."

"He's shy. And... and I think Mr. Hunt scared him off."

"We better go look for some more guys."

"Debbie, is that -all- you think about?" Tina stretches out on the bed in her pajamas and works her hair into tiny braids strung with beads.

"Well, they -are- missing, aren't they?"

Betty sighs. "Be sensible, Debs. They've captured some of the greatest minds out there--Dr. Socrates, Super Strategist--how are we going to get them back? Everybody who's gone after them has been captured, too."

"Well, at least we'd be captured and surrounded by some interesting guys."

"You're supposed to be the thinky one. If you can think of a plan, I'm in." Tina pats cold cream on her face.

Debbie hands her a washcloth and slips on her fringed Minnetonka moccasins. They sorta match her shaman's bag of dream dust. Sorta.

"Can't get a plan til we check out the scene!"

Her enthusiams is catching. Or maybe it's the Dream Dust talking.

In short order the girls (and Charlie the Butterfly) flutter down the stairs and hop in the Microbus. They are so caught up the evening's excitement, they don't notice the deep snoring coming from the backmost seat--plus, the collective scent of Love's Baby Soft, Wind Song, and Bal a Versailles completely overpower the strong scent of tobacco.

Previously in Mystery Men ... The Global Grappling All-Stars

Once more the evening sportscast cut away to a balding man in a purple tuxedo, although keen-eyed viewers will have spotted the new knee brace to compliment the brace around his neck. On the plus side, this week the report comes in before the horseshoe league results rather than after! Progress!

“Thank you Linda. Joining me once again is the man of the hour. Serge, this marks the second straight week you have teamed up with the hero Chicken Little to defend Champion City from the forces of villainy. Are we witnessing the birth of a new, powerhouse tag team?”

“It is fun to fight with the little one. I am large and easy to find. He is small and hard to catch. I do not speak so much, he speaks a great deal. It is a good match, I think. Perhaps we fight again someday, but next match I already have a partner.”

“Indeed you do, and we’ll be making that announcement momentarily. But for now, reports suggest that three rockworms similar to the creature you defeated earlier have been sighted in Shadow Hill. Do you have any words of wisdom to impart to those heroes that are about to come face to face with those dread leviathans?”

“If all else fails, hit them with a rock. It may not be sportsmanlike, but they do not seem to care.”

“Sage advice from the Ninth Wonder of the World: Serge the Colossal. Will the Champion City’s Champions be able to capitalize on the guidance offered by the gentle giant to make it two in a row against the subterranean threat? Or will this new triumvirate of tunneling find a measure of revenge for their fallen brother?”

“We’ll have those answers soon. But now, ladies and gentlemen, I’m pleased to announce that this coming evening, loyal fans of vigilante action will be treated to double the excitement! We have not one, but two exciting Global Grappling All-Stars matches destined for the crime-fighting record books!

“Our opening bout features the hottest hero since the Meteor, Serge the Colossal, teaming up with his long-time friend and rival, the ‘Manic Man’ Jamie Wild. It’s the Immovable Object alongside the Unstoppable Force! Together, this tag team of truth and justice will square off against the sinister Sarcastro and his partner, the Cuban Muscle Crisis! There will be no ‘cold’ in this all-out war as the All-Stars go Global and spark an international incident!

And then, our main event of the night: He’s the man on everyone’s hearts and minds this week: the

Conqueror of the Cauldron, the Pied Piper of Punks and Petty Thieves, the Cow Whisperer himself, Bombastro! His honeyed voice has the criminal element enchanted, but how will he fare when his skills are put to the test against the man known as the Tuxedo'ed Tenor, the Exclamation Point Executor, and the Voice of the Global Grappling All-Stars! That's right! Live from Bludhaven Docks: who is the true Master of the Microphone? It's Bombastro versus 'Mean Dean' in a voice-off for the Heavyweight Announcing Championship!

All of that, plus the answer to the question every fan is dying to know: will this be the week that Smash Samson makes his long-awaited debut for the forces of justice? I don't need to tell you folks that Storm Clouds of Smashomania have been building day after day in this fair city, and I would not want to be the villain caught out in the open when the torrential rains of righteousness finally fall! So grab your umbrellas everyone, it's going to be an explosive evening, brought to you live!"

Next Time in Mystery Men Comics!

UNDERMINER STEALS NUCLEAR POWER PLANT!

The Underminer undermines the city's source of electricity, and lets it fall into his shadowy domain! Fortunately, extremely long cables allow the city to continue running its electric equipment, but for how long, I ask you! FOR HOW LONG?

25 experience, +5 Fame, +5 Fortune

SHOWDOWN WITH STALIN GRAD!

Stalin Grad teams up with Teddy Roosevelt's arch-nemesis, the Terror! And they're take over the Industrial District! You know, for the *workers* ...

12 experience, +3 Fame

EVIL TWO-HEADED GIRAFFE MAN!

Robs a bank, because there aren't any Leaf Depositories in this town.

6 experience, +3 Fame

SHADOW HILL FALLS INTO THE EARTH!

An army of Rockworms undermines the old hills and quiet graveyards of Shadow Hill, and nine square miles of territory fall into flames and belching smoke! Everyone always knew Shadow Hill would be the first to go to Hell ... but no, there it is, just a few hundred feet below street level, and there aren't any demons. Just Rockworms. Oh, and faceless yellow stone men. The ones previously believed to be from Saturn.

18 experience, +3 Luck

PUTTY IN THE SCULPTOR'S HANDS!

The Sculptor animates all the monumental statues that tower over Champion City. The Captain Amazing statue is pretty big, but the Mr. Furious and Captain Clothes Pins Monuments are made of freaking granite. And they're tearing up Downtown!

18 experience, +6 Fame

VAN DAM OVERFLOWS THE RIVER!

The diminutive Belgian martial artist/hydraulic engineer Van Dam has built a concrete dam across the Champion River with his insta-hardening concrete! And he's captured all the brave little boys who tried to poke their fingers through the dike. He's demanding a billion dollars, or Champion City is going to float downstream one building at a time!

14 experience, +2 Fame, +2 Luck