Welcome to the ultimate d20 system superhero role-playing game. *Silver Age Sentinels* pushes the boundaries of the d20 system with exciting and innovative new rules.

Liberty
Justice
Security
Peace

Every age has its Heroes — men and women who refuse to believe that humanity has a limit for kindness and compassion. These heroes understand the power that an individual holds to change the direction of society. Through their actions, they inspire others to reach beyond their own perceived limitations and strive for greatness.

Believe. It will come true.
FOREWORD

There’s a first time for everything, they say. Welcome to our first foray into publishing d20 products. It’s been quite a ride, and we’re happy to be here at long last.

One thing you’ll notice immediately upon reading this book: Silver Age Sentinels isn’t your traditional d20 game. An entirely new mechanic has been added on top of the standard d20 rules, perhaps best described as a “point-based superpower creation system.” In these pages, you will encounter many terms not used in other d20 System games: Attributes, Defects, PMVs, Progressions, and others. The addition of this new layer not only allows us to make Silver Age Sentinels a great d20 game, but a great superhero game. Sometimes we spin a standard d20 rule in a new direction, or change it completely, but everything is done to match the system with the genre as closely as possible. We believe you will be pleased with the final result.

The question many industry colleagues have asked us is “What makes you so sure your game will succeed when so many superhero RPGs have failed in the past?” The answer, we believe, is twofold. First, many of the previous games featured a mechanics system that was tied too intricately to the world setting. A superhero RPG must provide for the entire milieu of comic book power levels and diversity, from the skilled street vigilante to the powerful spandex hero to the overwhelming galactic entity. An RPG that only allows characters to exist within a fraction of that spectrum will naturally only appeal to a select group of role-players. One of our primary goals for Silver Age Sentinels was the inclusion of rules and guidelines to accommodate any character imaginable. By giving players what they demanded — an easy-to-learn game system with a flexible power creation mechanic — we could give the game a chance to succeed in the marketplace.

The second reason role-players may not have embraced some of the other games is that the designers forgot to include the “hero” in superhero. The heroic ideals prevalent in the Silver Age of comics — duty, honour, responsibility, charity, hope, nobility, spirit, and others — are an integral part of Silver Age Sentinels (as reflected in the title). Our instinct told us that fans of the superhero genre didn’t want to play angst-ridden, corrupted, battle-weary, tainted, morally deficient, jaded, or flawed characters in capes and masks. They wanted to play heroes. Perhaps the Sentinel said it best:

“Liberty. Justice. Security. Peace. These are the four pillars of a better world; a land of hope, freedom, and truth, where life is not a burden to endure but a joy to experience. There are threats you cannot conquer, tragedies you cannot avoid, and sins you cannot punish. We are here to help. We will support you when you stumble, keep watch when you sleep, and help you achieve the unreachable. We will show you how to touch Paradise. We are The Guard, and you are safe on our watch.”

Enough talk. It’s time to save the world....

Mark C. MacKinnon
July 2002
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ROLE-PLAYING GAME MANIFESTO

These rules are written on paper, not etched in stone tablets.

Rules are suggested guidelines, not required edicts.

If the rules don’t say you can’t do something, you can.

There are no official answers, only official opinions.

When dice conflict with the story, the story always wins.

Min/Maxing and munchkinism aren’t problems with the game; they’re problems with the player.

The Game Master has full discretionary power over the game.

The Game Master always works with, not against, the players.

A game that is not fun is no longer a game — it’s a chore.

This book contains the answers to all things.

When the above does not apply, make it up.
INTRODUCTION TO HEROISM 101

Welcome, truly. These pages contain the culmination of a love for the near-endless vault of hope contained within a milieu known simply as comics. More specifically, it is a celebration of that most admired of qualities — heroism, and its avatars, superheroes.

Heroes are not products of 19th and 20th century principles. The notions of mortals endowed with powers and superior faculties stem from ancient times, in the mythological champions Bellerophone, Gilgamesh, King Arthur, Hercules, Nuada of the Silver Hand, and many more. They exist in religious texts, though these individuals were instead saints, martyrs, and prophets.

Despite the gap between the guardians of then and the knights of today, they all share one quality in common, one aspect that both unites and distinguishes them. They are all reflections of their times and societies. Thus, Hercules could fly into drunken rages and slaughter people, yet still remain heroic to the ancient Greeks. Nuada could lose his arm in a society that prizes physical perfection and still remain a champion to the Celts.

With this in mind, the vanguards of contemporary society exist within a mythological framework called comic books. Like their historical counterparts, superheroes are also reflections of today's societies and mores. If that's the case, however, one must wonder what society thinks of itself to generate heroes with a bloodlust to rival the Aztec deities, or heroes that are respected for falling from grace. Despite an appreciation for artistic license, many comics or heroic representations have shifted perspectives from the positive end of the spectrum to its negative extreme.

Why?

Is society so enamoured with its inadequacies that it wishes to topple its champions as well? Heroes are supposed to embody the best in society. They are something to which we aspire, a model of conduct and wish fulfillment for our best dreams. If society humbles and kills its own virtues, then who serves as a role model? Who helps people believe in themselves as something greater than a collection of foibles?

Welcome to Silver Age Sentinels, a role-playing game to champion the champions. Here, hope is not the ragged flame of a solitary candle holding back night, but a raging bonfire to warm the human tribe. It is around such bonfires where the first heroes appeared in the smoke and flame. It was around these gatherings when men and women sat with their backs to the darkness and first created their champions, offering each other security and hope that the world was not as frightening as they believed. To them, heroes were not about names, powers, and costumes. To them, heroes were all about righteous action and triumph.

Within these pages exist those heroes, a fusion of humanity's best, and the hope for its collective future and well being.

Welcome, truly. We saved you a seat by the bonfire....

THE HISTORY OF COMICS

In the not-too-distant past, “comic books,” as we know them, didn't exist. There were no “funny pages,” no superheroes in colourful costumes fighting the forces of evil. Less than a century ago, comic books appeared on the scene and have created an entirely new genre of literature and storytelling that has entertained millions of readers, young and old.

Comic books debuted in an America under the weight of the Great Depression, when people were filled with uncertainty about the future. They offered fun, entertaining stories cheap enough for anyone to buy them, from kids to adults. They attracted writers and artists who created entire imaginary worlds and populated them with heroes and villains. They created a kind of new mythology, legendary stories of the deeds of great heroes and heroines.

Since they first appeared, comic books have become a part of our culture, not just in the United States where they started, but around the world. More comic books have been printed, sold, and read than all the New York Times best-selling novels of the past fifty years put together. Many people in the world are more familiar with comic book icons like Superman or Spider-Man than they are with many celebrities or political leaders. Children in foreign countries have often learned to read English from comic books; comics brought over by servicemen following World War II caught on in Japan, creating the vast manga and anime industries there, for example.

Hundreds of publishers have created thousands of different titles and characters over the years, although only a few publishers have remained at the top of the comic book industry. Still, even those giants were nearly displaced by the appearance of new and innovative publishers in the 1990s. Young writers and artists have experimented with the medium, finding new ways to express stories, and comic books (or “graphic literature,” as some prefer to call them) have even won literary awards and found their way onto the New York Times Bestseller List.

The history of comics is told in the vast number of back issues lovingly preserved by collectors, showing the progression of the stories and art over the years. This chapter can only summarize that long and colourful history, touching on its high and low points. It offers an introduction to the wondrous world of the comics.

COMICS BEFORE THE COMICS

The nearest ancestors of the superhero comics were the stories of the “pulp” fiction magazines of the 1930s, which featured characters like Doc Savage, the Shadow, and the Spider, Master of Men. Such characters often maintained secret identities, had elaborate headquarters and gadgets, and even possessed strange powers beyond those of other men. Many comic book writers got their start writing for adventure and science-fiction pulps, and many publishers had produced pulp magazines at one time.
In the early 1930s, magazine and newspaper publishers experimented with collections of daily comic strips like Funnies on Parade and Famous Funnies. New Fun Comics featured the first work of two teenagers from Cleveland named Jerry Siegel and (Canadian-born) Joe Shuster: a mystic detective by the name of Dr. Occult. The collections of short strips and stories proved popular, and publishers began putting out more of them.

In 1937, Detective Comics, Inc. was started by publishers Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson and Harry Donenfeld. They put out Detective Comics #1, a collection of mystery and "private eye" stories, that year. Although the series would become the home of one of the most famous superheroes of all time, it was up to another comic book from the same company to start the phenomenon that would make comics a permanent part of American culture.

**THE GOLDEN AGE**

In 1938, comic creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster were trying to sell a new comic strip to newspapers. With no luck, they turned to comic book publishers and found a home for the character with National Periodicals (also known as Detective Comics, Inc.). In June of 1938, Action Comics #1 hit the newsstands. The cover showed a brightly costumed man in a red cape lifting a car over his head while criminals fled from him in terror. His name was Superman.

Shuster had moved to Cleveland at age 10, but his memories of Toronto were very vivid, especially those of working as a newspaper boy for the Toronto Star. According to a 1992 interview with Shuster, the inspiration for Metropolis came not from Cleveland, but from Toronto, which he considered more metropolitan, bigger, and more beautiful. Clark Kent was originally a reporter for the Daily Star, a clear tribute to the paper that was such a tremendous influence on Shuster's life, but a New York editor ordered them to rename it in 1940, it became the Daily Planet.

By its fourth issue, Action Comics had more than doubled its sales. Publisher Donenfeld ordered a survey to find out why the book was so successful. He found out that kids weren’t asking for Action

Comics; they wanted “the comic book with Superman in it!” The idea of a “superhero” was a hit. Three months after Superman’s first appearance, Centaur Publishing featured a new costumed hero, the Arrow, in Funny Pages. The following month, Detective Comics gave the world its third superhero, the Crimson Avenger.

In 1939, almost a year after Superman’s debut, Detective Comics #27 featured another new hero, a “weird figure of the dark ... [t]his avenger of evil,” called Batman. The comic was a hit and superheroes were around to stay. 1940 saw a tremendous boom in superhero comics, with the introduction of dozens of new characters. DC-Comics (as Detective Comics, Inc. became known) introduced the Flash, “the Fastest Man Alive,” in Flash Comics (January 1940), along with Hawkman, the Specter, Hourman, Green Lantern, and the Atom. Batman also got his own title and a kid sidekick: a boy named Robin (Batman #1, Spring, 1940). DC also launched All-Star Comics to spotlight their new heroes. By the third issue, they had banded together as the Justice Society of America, comics’ first superhero team.

Other publishers were hopping on the superhero bandwagon. Fawcett Publications’ first comic book, Whiz Comics (February 1940), featured a new hero called Captain Marvel, whose secret identity was Billy Batson, boy radio announcer. Just by saying the magic word “SHAZAM!” Billy could become the World’s Mightiest Mortal. Fawcett introduced Master Man and Bulletman later that same year.

Comic publisher Timely Comics (later Marvel Comics) introduced over a dozen new superhero characters, including the Human Torch, the Sub-Mariner and Red Raven. But Marvel’s most popular character in the 1940s was the patriotic Captain America, who first appeared in a series of Nazi-smashing adventures in 1941. He later teamed up with Marvel’s other Golden Age heroes in All-Winners (with their kid sidekicks as the Young Allies).

That year also saw the first appearance of the third of DC Comics’ greatest heroes: the Amazon princess known as Wonder Woman, in All-Star Comics #8. Psychologist Dr. William Marston, writing under the name Charles
Moulton, created Wonder Woman with artist Harry Peter. Marston intended the character to embody his ideas about women’s liberation and Wonder Woman proved a hit with girl readers (although Marston’s work would be later criticized by some as sexist). Until Wonder Woman’s appearance, superheros were all male, and they generally remained so, reflecting the demographics of the (mostly male) comic book audience.

**The World at War**

The start of World War II saw a shift in the fledgling comic book industry. Patriotic heroes like Captain America became more popular even as wartime restrictions like paper rationing made comics more expensive to print. Although the total number of titles produced fell off, sales remained about the same, and the industry continued to grow. The number of American servicemen reading comics was one of the contributing factors to increased sales, along with the popularity of the books among kids.

Following the war, the growth of the comic book industry remained steady and new genres of comics began to appear. As women assumed a more public role during and after the war, more heroines appeared in the comics, with names like Miss Liberty and Miss America, along with detectives like Miss Cairo Jones. Publishers also experimented with “career girl” comics that featured girls or young women out in the working world such as Patty Walker, Millie the Model, and Nellie the Nurse.

The post-war years also saw an increase in crime comics like Murder Incorporated and Crime Does Not Pay with “true detective” stories, while superhero comics tapered off somewhat.

The 1950s saw the appearance of horror comics, led by EC Comics and their titles Vault of Horror, Crypt of Terror, and Haunt of Fear. For several years, EC set new standards for writing and art in comic books. Other companies imitated them with horror titles of their own.

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**The Code**

Three things happened in 1954 that had a significant impact on the comics industry. First, Dr. Frederic Wertham published his book *Seduction of the Innocent*, a scathing criticism of comic books. The US Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency held public hearings on the effects of comic books on children, and comic book publishers responded by establishing the self-regulatory Comics Code Authority.

Wertham, psychiatrist and long-time critic of comic books, claimed that comic books led to abnormal behaviour in the young people who read them. Wertham’s argument was largely based on guilt by association. Since abnormal kids read comics, comic books must be the cause of abnormal behaviour. The fact that nearly ninety-percent of the children in the United States read comic books (making the actual percentage of comic readers who displayed abnormal behaviour quite small) was ignored. Wertham also asserted that comics promoted sexual deviancy, particularly homosexuality, which raised the fears of many parents.

The Senate’s report on “Comic Books and Delinquency” likewise found that comics constituted “a concentrated diet of crime, horror, and violence” and that they could have “potentially detrimental effects” on children. The report called for a standard for comic books that would remove such dangerous elements in order to protect the nation’s youth.

The comics industry responded by establishing the Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America on October 26, 1954. It was one of the strictest codes in the entertainment business and stated, among other things that “all scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.” Any comic book company that wanted its titles distributed had to adhere to the code.

This crippled many publishers, like EC, who had to cancel their entire lines. Other publishers scrambled to comply with the new code, doctoring finished artwork to cover...