

RETRO

Golden Heroes

First published by Games Workshop in 1984 – now out of print

Forget dragons and oddly garbed wizards: in the early 80s, superheroes were in! Marvel was first on the scene, swiftly followed by DC, but then Games Workshop socked us with *Golden Heroes*. Tony Johnston dons his cape.

The appeal of superheroes isn't limited to comic collectors and film fans. *Everyone's* seen the TV version of *Batman*, we're all aware of the eternal struggle of good verses evil, and who of you can honestly say you've never wished you could fly? As a superhero you hold the fate of the universe in your hands, and with your great powers comes responsibility. The restrictions placed on superheroes are tight: do not kill, show mercy to your enemies, and fight fair. To be a hero requires courage, selflessness and a quick mind, aspects that can only be demonstrated through roleplaying, not a quick roll of the dice. And Games Workshop knew a thing or two about roleplaying (once).

Golden Heroes, Games Workshop's only ever superhero RPG, did its best to look like a comic; from the covers of the rulebooks to the hastily created (and often terribly named) characters that illustrated the rules, every element of the design clearly indicated the feel GW was after. And for those of us who thought we could do better than Marvel or DC, it was a godsend. Right from the word go there was something very defiant about it – the odd jargon broke away from the American conventions, and the creation of original characters (rather than re-hashed, familiar heroes) was encouraged.

Indeed, superhero creation was one of *Golden Heroes'* strongest points. A simple step-by-step process of four stats, randomly rolled superpowers and rationalising one's background. The random aspect of your powers often produced some bizarre combinations, but the player was encouraged to link them

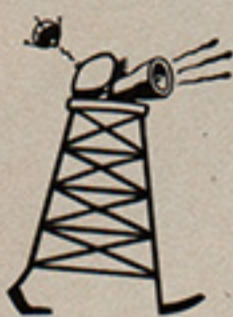
imaginatively rather than just discard any 'inconvenient' powers, and four pages of example rationales gave you a good head start when creating your own.

designed in the comic book style... As well as a hit points equivalent, there was a secondary form of damage, Hit to Coma, which, when depleted, meant that a character was merely knocked out instead of killed.

In the handling of campaigns and character development *Golden Heroes* was equally accomplished. Each PC had three Campaign Ratings: Public Status, Detective Points and Personal Status. This innovative system gave you a tangible reflection on your character's actions: show mercy to villains and kiss babies on the streets and your Public Status would rise. On the other hand, if you speak in short, monosyllabic sentences, rarely socialise or adopt a defeatist attitude your Personal Status falls.

These three ratings could then be rolled against in appropriate situations. Low Public Status? Maybe the people throw rotten fruit at you while you try to stop a bank robbery. High Detective Points? Hey, you just happen to have a friend on the force who knows someone who... and so on. A superb system, and one which some referees I know still use today, adapted for other games.

Alas, *Golden Heroes* was dropped after a short while. Without the captive audience of an established comic book line, maybe GW decided it just wasn't worth the effort. Later in the decade, the popular comics themes changed too, marking the demise of the classic superhero and shattering any hope that *Golden Heroes* would be resurrected. But sometimes, on dark nights, you can still see the odd flowing cape atop Tower Bridge. Where did I put my tights? 🖐



As was common for Games Workshop games at the time, *Golden Heroes* came in a box containing two rulebooks, a map and a sheet of cut-out cardboard miniatures.

The Combat section opens with the immortal line: "The eternal struggle between Good and Evil is symbolised in the world of comics by what is commonly known as a slugfest."



Combat was handled with the same expedience: a round consisted of four Frames (continuing the comic book feel), with some attacks and actions requiring more Frames than others to complete. Heroes and villains could act in all four Frames, whereas 'ordinary' folk could perform actions in three Frames at most. Attacks were extremely simple to perform



– a single roll on a D20 was all that was needed. It was neat, it was quick, and it re-created the feel of comics perfectly.

Golden Heroes used a great device for damage calculation and, again, it was