

Introduction

Superhero, and other comics, that have been around for decades have built deep histories written by hundreds of writers. Every new comic line, tv show, or movie in the shared universe adds another layer - a collaboration over time to build a rich setting for the beloved characters to live in. This depth makes every victory or defeat more powerful because they are grounded in a world that feels truly lived in.

Signal Light is a hack of Microscope designed to help create a rich comic universe backstory. It is strongly influenced by the tone and setting of the game Masks: A New Generation which is itself influenced by the real histories of Marvel and DC comics.

This hack can be played for its own enjoyment, but it was created as a way to create a history that could then be the basis of a pen and paper game. It is a way to share creative responsibilities of the world you'll play in.

What You Need to Play

Signal Light is an adaptation of Microscope, not a stand-alone game, so you need the Microscope rules to play. It is designed to create a rich backstory for a Masks game. It's recommended you also have the Masks: A New Generation rulebook handy.

You'll also need:

- ◆ Two to Four people, Including yourself. The people involved in your Masks game.
- ◆ One to Three hours.
- ◆ Index cards, at least twenty or thirty. Use normal 3x5 cards. Colorful cards will help differentiate.
- ◆ Pens, pencils, or Markers

Set Up

Step 1: Establish the Generations

Masks is a game about generations of superheroes. Even if you don't want to use the Proper Nouns from the Masks book you can use the rough framework of their generations.

Decide as a group what your generations will be called and what they will be known for. Everything that happens in your history will start after the arrival of the first Hero and before the rise of modern heroes. Write down the Generations and what defined them. These will generations bookend your story.

Here are the Masks default generations for perspective

- **The Gold Generation**
 - The Originals. The Greatest. A Simpler Era.
- **The Silver Generation**
 - The Powerful. The Political. The Change Era.
- **The Bronze Generation**
 - The Complicated. The Different. The Cynical Era.
- **The Modern Generation**
 - The Hopeful. The Millennial. The New Generation

Step 2: Pallet

Follow the normal instructions for making your Palette. This is a good time to establish which typical superhero tropes you want to lean into or avoid.

Step 3: First Pass

Focusing on describing the element of the history the **Lens** focused on, each player gets to add a Mask/Face, Organization, Cover, or Location.

Play

As you play you'll add details to the history by creating the moving parts that make the history feel rich and interesting. Play follows the same pattern as a normal Microscope game except there are different types of cards.

Pick a **Lens**. It can be anyone and everyone will have a chance. The Lens will decide on a **Focus** or topic that play for the pass will try to focus on. These can be as simple as deciding to focus on one of the card types or as complicated as you like. Each pass will explore one aspect of the history of the world.

Make History. Starting with the lens and taking turns everyone will add one of the following to the timeline.

Masks and Faces: These heroes, villains, and average citizens are the best and worst of us. They are the focus of our story. They are the heroic champions who inspire us and the terrible scum who strike fear in our hearts. They are the bureaucrats who erect a city from ashes. Decide on a name, describe their power (if they have any), and when they came to fame. Use color cards or shapes to indicate if they had a positive or negative influence.

Place their card next to the generation card when they rose to prominence.

Organizations: When in the course of super events it comes it becomes necessary to have an awesome team-up comic, Heroes, Villains, and the brave citizens of the city organize to achieve goals. Decide on a name for the organization, describe their purpose, decide if/when they disband.

Place their card below the Generation when they were formed.

Covers: The central pillar of a good history is creating and retelling the events that live on in oral histories of the denizens of the city. Certain moments in the history of your city are burned into the minds of everyone. These are the moments captured on the covers and two-page spreads of a comic book. Describe the scene, who is involved, and a title.

Place the card next to the generation when the event the cover depicts happened.

Locations: These can be as specific or broad as needed. Dynamite Jacks Diner is just as important as the Block financial district. Whenever a location comes up discussion of any of the other card types, *also place a location card for free*.

Place the card along with whichever card first established it.