



## C.O.W.L. Volume 1: Principles of Power

*Kyle Higgins , Alec Siegel , Rod Reis (Illustrations) , Trevor McCarthy (Illustrations)*

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**C.O.W.L. Volume 1: Principles of Power** Kyle Higgins , Alec Siegel , Rod Reis (Illustrations) , Trevor McCarthy (Illustrations)

Welcome to the "Chicago Organized Workers League"- the world's first Super-Hero Labor Union! While C.O.W.L. once stood as a beacon of hope against an epidemic of organized crime and an unbeatable "brotherhood" of Super-Villains, the union now faces its fiercest foe yet-a disillusioned public. In targeting the last of the great villains, C.O.W.L. attempts to prove its value to the world and to each other, while staving off villainy from both outside and inside its offices.

## C.O.W.L. Volume 1: Principles of Power Details

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Author : Kyle Higgins , Alec Siegel , Rod Reis (Illustrations) , Trevor McCarthy (Illustrations)

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## From Reader Review C.O.W.L. Volume 1: Principles of Power for online ebook

### Anne says

Even though it's nothing super-duper new or special, I thought this was pretty good. *Not* mind-blowing, but *decent*.

The gist of the story is that superheroes are unionized now, and work for an agency called C.O.W.L., instead of doing things on their own. Which is great, because now they have health and dental, right?

I'm still not sure of all the particulars, but the agency apparently farms their services out to the police force. They're right in the middle of renegotiating their contract, when (in the opening pages) the Supers take out the last Big Villain.

Great!

Except, now the city isn't so sure they want (or need) to shell out the big bucks these guys want to stay on the payroll.

The leader of C.O.W.L. is a bit shady (as union bosses usually are), and there are some secrets that he seems to have been keeping that has one of the non-powered agents digging around...in places he shouldn't.

*\*cue suspenseful music\**

Because it's set 'back in the day', the female team member deals with lots of blatant sexism. Sort of strange seeing one of the most powerful team members getting patted on the head like that, but it made sense for the time period.

Stuff happens, supers go on strike, people die, secrets are uncovered, and a few of the team members go sort of rogue. There's a cliffhanger ending, but I want to see how the story plays out, so I'll keep reading. I thought it was a decent twist on the superhero genre, but nothing that I would actively push on my friends.

*This one was another one gifted to me in that Humble Bundle. Thank you, Mike!*

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### Steve says

I received this from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

I liked this one, especially the back-and-forth between the COWL union representatives and the Chicago reps. The story reminded me of a cross between The Watchmen (superheroes with major emotional and

psychological problems) and The Incredible (superheroes no longer "needed" by the people they're protecting).

I'll definitely be looking for the next volume in this series.

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### **Dan says**

Very cool art style but while this has a cool concept I felt that it fell short. It seemed to lack any character development and I honestly felt no attachment to any of them. I heard volume 2 is much better but is it really?

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### **James DeSantis says**

This was okayish. Since running low on time today make this a quickie. Taking place in the 60's a organization of superheros are trying to stop criminals and super villains from rising once again. Basically a police force of superheroes. In doing so this story is a bit of fighting, a lot of political talk, and some pretty interesting art moments. This didn't blow me away but it was good enough to finish even if it did get dull at points. A 2.5 out of 5.

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### **Damon says**

I enjoyed this one. A good detective character. Guy at the top with questionable morals. Unionized Special police force unsure of their directives.

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### **Sam Quixote says**

COWL is the Chicago Organized Workers League, aka the world's first superhero labor union. Makes sense I suppose, not all superheroes have the resources of Bruce Wayne's billions. But you know why no writers really focus too much on how superheroes get their rent paid? Because it's not even remotely interesting!!

It's 1962 and after years of protecting Chicago from supervillains, COWL have disposed of them all, effectively making themselves redundant. So when it comes to renegotiating their contract with the city, they find themselves at a disadvantage as the mayor is interested in cutting down COWL's services and save the city's budget.... zzz.....

The superheroes in this book are so generic they're instantly forgettable. Names like the Grey Raven, Blaze and Sparrow can fly, move things with their minds, and shoot bright power beams. Not that every superhero book has to do this but there's no mention of how these superheroes came by their powers – they just show up one day with them and that's it. Seems a tad lazy to me, but then no aspect of the characters seems to have had much effort put into it.

COWL are also complete scumbags. It was in the first chapter when one of the "superheroes" gets his dick

out and starts pissing on some poor bastard they're questioning on the street that I began to hate COWL. Imagine if Green Lantern did that in Justice League! But are we supposed to like COWL anyway? And who's the main character – who're we supposed to be rooting for? No clue, all I know is I didn't like anyone in this book!

Then the “story” itself. Let’s see. There are no antagonists for the superheroes to fight. Some of them decide to picket City Hall so we get to see that yawner of a scene. There are multiple scenes where characters are negotiating contracts that you won’t believe made it into a comic. There’s some banal commentary on sexism in the 60s that Mad Men have already done to death. And scene after scene after scene starring repugnant, bland, and unmemorable characters talking drivel to one another.

Kyle Higgins has done some good work at DC in the last few years. Batman: Gates of Gotham, New 52 Deathstroke and New 52 Nightwing were all pretty good books. COWL, though? Yikes! Throw in some bafflingly contrived Bill Sienkiewicz-styled artwork from Rod Reis and you’ve got an utter stinker of a comic. Strike this out from your reading list!

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### **Crystal Starr Light says**

Bullet Review:

Anybody heard of consistency in art? No? OK then...

The last issue is probably the most interesting as it seems to make the whole thing different from another Watchman or Jupiter's Circle clone. This isn't the most ground-breaking or earth-shattering comic I've ever read, but for a time waster, could be worse.

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### **'kris Pung says**

Pretty cool new series that had some interesting characters, world building, and some unexpected twists. The only thing I didn't really care for is the contract negotiations part in the middle really seemed to slow down the momentum of the book.

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### **David Schaafsma says**

"Welcome to the "Chicago Organized Workers League"- the world's first Super-Hero Labor Union!" the blurb says about this series. C.O.W.L. And it has all these elements: union activism, crime drama, period piece (sixties, at least in this volume, which calls up not NYC MadMen but Chicago, though it has some resemblance to Madmen with some of the fancier characters), working class, Chicago history, politics, and some (not all) of the COWL dudes have superpowers. So, there's a lot of things here I like. And maybe more total things all thrown together than I'd like? Maybe too much stuff? Not necessarily. I like the sixties. I live in Chicago. I'm a union activist! I leant more well told stories with real life politics in them and I wanted to like this one.

And I don't, yet. This first volume would appear to be a kind of world-making set-up for a comic that will

look at Chicago/working class/urban politics with some guys with superpowers mixed with tough cops/working class south side folks. Supposed to be gritty. But it's not Miller or Brubaker or Azzarello gritty as it should be. And the writing's not that good... yet? The subtitle is "the principles of power" so we get to see a Marxist story of capitalism and mob run amok, right? But really, are these the principles Higgins is talking about? It's not clear. The situation here is that COWL has done its job and has run most of the bad guys out of town and is corrupt and jaded and not getting along with each other and they need an angle, they need to create or allow back in super villains so they can be relevant again. A turn on Watchmen, in a way? So what principles are operating here that we can take away? And who is it are the central characters in this drama?

This idea could be promising, and it has a really nice look: dark, sketchy, cool coloring by Rod Reis (Justice League). But I am not sold on it yet. Feels flat for all those elements it mixes into the brew. Not much really happens... yet? The superpowers feel generic. The basic premise for action we might really care about is not (yet?) there, since in this volume COWL has basically worked itself out of a job! So the superpowers and basic story feel kinda lame, really, so far. But I'm a Chicago guy, I want this to work somehow, so I will take a look at the next one....

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### **Leo says**

Well, that was a disappointment. And it's my fault, I looked at the gorgeous covers and I though the story was going to be good. Interesting at least. Well, no, I couldn't care less about what happens to the COWL guys. I liked the art, but I didn't really find anything in the story that compelled me to continue reading. On the bright side, one less comic I have to buy, less money I have to spend.

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### **Eric Mesa says**

This review was originally published at <http://www.comicpow.com/2016/01/06/wh...> (go there to see images). This review covers both volumes (which is the entire story), but is extremely light on plot spoilers, so don't worry too much about that.

Two things attracted me to C.O.W.L.: the subject matter and the author. I knew Kyle Higgins from Nightwing Vol 3 (AKA New 52 Nightwing) where I enjoyed his writing. C.O.W.L. takes place in Chicago in 1962 when unions are still strong and the Chicago Organized Workers League (C.O.W.L.) happens to be the superhero union. Similar to Watchmen, and very in vogue right now, the heroes are not pure of heart; some of them are just shy of being sadists.

The main plot of Watchmen is two-fold, someone is investigating hero murder and someone is trying to create a tragedy to unite humanity and end the Cold War. But knowing that doesn't take away from the story, which is a deconstruction of Super Heroes and is focused on their stories and personalities. Similarly, the main plot of C.O.W.L. is a negotiation with the city about whether to continue the contract with C.O.W.L., but the story is about the characters Higgins has created. If I may continue the comparison for one more subject, I'd say that both Watchmen and C.O.W.L. benefit from being self-contained stories of about the same length. It allows Higgins to focus on the story without worrying about the long-term implications for his characters.

We tend to take it for granted that those with super powers (especially if they aren't gifted in tragic circumstances) become heroes. There are very few stories in which those gifted with powers decide to simply take because they can or use their powers for selfish gain. Heck, we rarely see heroes for hire (despite a perennial Marvel title with that name). This is why it hit me so hard when the head of C.O.W.L. mentions during negotiations that one of the benefits to the city of Chicago is that C.O.W.L. gives super humans a productive way to use their powers rather than turning to crime. I'd never thought of it that way before – our classic heroes and villains tend to be pretty black and white. The villains were either criminals before their got powers or felt they were wronged by society and heroes just chose to be good. Most of the good guys have regular jobs for their regular human personas, but what about the supers in a bad economy? Would they simply let themselves starve? One of the oldest ethics debates I ever remember having is when it is OK to steal – like for sustenance. What if your powers meant you'd likely never be caught, wouldn't you use them to make sure you didn't die? And once on that slippery slope, might you simply use your powers to become middle-class?

Setting the story in 1962 allows Higgins to explore unions at the pinnacle of their power, but it also allows him a significant B-story about sexism. The 1960s were a weird time for women in the workplace. World War II had taught them they were just as capable as men in the workplace, but Eisenhower's America needed them to go home so that the economy could absorb the men who'd come back. But their daughters were having none of that and found themselves in a world that was begrudgingly accepting them while treating them with condescension. After all, if women were equal to men, where had they been all these years? (Of course, ignoring that women not working was an anomaly when viewed against the whole of human history) Radia, the seemingly sole woman in C.O.W.L. finds herself in the especially frustrating position of being treated like a woman in the workplace while having super powers, making her stronger than most men. I don't want to spoil how she deals with this issue because it ends up playing into the narrative in a few key points, but it's definitely an idea that Higgins explores rather well.

And now we arrive at the crux of this book, the negotiations between C.O.W.L. and the city of Chicago. There will be spoilers here, but as I said before, I don't think they take away from the actual story and characters of C.O.W.L.. As I mentioned above, it's rare for super heroes to find employment as super heroes. Most of them are essentially moonlighting as heroes and some of the drama in their book comes from that balancing act. The closest two I can think of are the X-Men and the Fantastic Four. The X-Men are employed because they are supers, but not to be supers. Officially, they're employed as teachers. The Fantastic Four similarly are all working for a foundation, but I've always been under the impression that their income comes from Reed Richards' inventions or other scientific contributions. So why is it that we never see super heroes getting paid for being super heroes? Well, for one thing, it doesn't jive with our image of hero purity. The bad guys are in it for the money and the good guys are in it for justice. But C.O.W.L. reveals a different issue with heroes getting paid to be heroes – unintended consequences.

Channeling a lot of what's been in the air over the past decade or so, Higgins essentially sets up C.O.W.L. to be a unionized government contractor. As super villain crime has fallen, the mayor of Chicago is under pressure to negotiate terms that are more favorable to the city at the expense of C.O.W.L. Unions have really only one real bargaining chip – to strike. So C.O.W.L. orders its supers to strike in order to get the city to meet its demands. It has to do this in order to do what's right for its employees and keep them gainfully employed. But it's one thing when car factory workers strike, it's something entirely different when public safety officials strike – people can get hurt or die. And so this radically changes the super hero equation. Imagine Superman letting Lex Luthor take over the world unless his bills are paid.

But the incentives become even more perverse. There will always be fires and petty criminals. But if there are no super villains, what does the city care if super heroes are on strike? So the head of C.O.W.L. makes a

deal with a mob boss who's been employing super villains to make sure the villains wear costumes so they are recognized as super villains. In a nutshell, this provides the leverage C.O.W.L. needs, but at the expense of terrorizing the public.

There are lots of other small subplots within these eleven issues (or two trades) that make it worth reading – Higgins has created a fascinating world with very believable characters aided by popping art by Rod Reis and Stephane Perger.

I enjoy discussion, so join me wherever you happen to read this.

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### **Martin says**

I'd really liked Kyle Higgins' Batman: Gates of Gotham and was interested in reading more things from him, so when I came across this book at my LCS, I found the premise interesting - and factoring in the \$ 9.99 price point - I said to myself 'What the hell...' and took the plunge.

This inaugural volume did a good job of establishing the main characters & their motivations. The art was at times confusing and unclear, but otherwise okay. Gritty, scratchy, setting the right tone for the story. I won't mind reading volume 2, but I won't exactly go out of my way to read it, either.

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### **Cheese says**

I put off reading this for a while because of other reviews I had read, but I had the feeling I get when I know I'm going to like it. When I read Anne's review and saw the artwork that was the final trigger for me.

The artwork is brilliant and the era that it's set in is one of my favourites. A little bit like mad men.

C.O.W.L are like a task force, consisting of members who all have their own gifts. Some of them have powers and some don't but they all have expertise and they all use them to keep Chicago safe. The story is kind of cliché, but not all of it is.

I think what makes this so good for me are the characters, they are well defined and easy to follow.

I'm glad I read this and I'll definitely be following the series.

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### **Kate says**

I loved the artwork but the story was all over the place. By the end of the volume I simply didn't care enough about the characters or the plotline.

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## Gavin says

This is it, the first Stinker from my Image Humble Bundle...1 star seems a bit harsh, so 1.5, which means 2 on GR.

COWL is a piece of derivative work. It's ripping off Watchmen, and every other book written about a team/group of heroes where things aren't what they seem, and the relationships between everyone are actually pretty shitty.

On top of that, the art looks like a bad copy of Bill Sienkiewicz (from the Elektra Assassin book by Frank Miller in the 80s). Rod Reis, is he related to Ivan Reis? Ivan has done some pretty decent work (Papa Johns' Aquaman for one), but Rod here? Not so much. In the same page, he'll draw the same character's face twice, and the guy will look 30 in one panel, and 55 in the next. There's no continuity, and with the dull colour palette used, they become quite mirky, and hard to distinguish, and at some point I stopped really trying.

I know the art is meant to evoke some sort of seedy stuff, but this felt like a Frank Miller book, and that's NOT a compliment in this case.

It's too dark, but feels like a poseur. The subject matter just isn't enough to wow or really grab me...I'm beginning to think that reading all this IMAGE COMICS stuff is great, because when it's not up to snuff, it really stands out, but if I were reading stuff that were ho-hum, then the turds wouldn't stink as much...if that makes sense.

As for the story, COWL is the Chicago Superhero Union. (Organized Worker League) Yup, after WWII, Chicago was run rampant with organized crime, so the returning vets/supes in Chi-town decided to set up this Superhero Union so they could all get dental and 2 weeks paid holiday. At the time there was a bunch of badguys, "The Six"...but this was late 40s-into the 50s.

However, it's now 1962, and the last link to the Six is taken down by COWL heroes...so with the contract negotiations in place, it lets the Mayor of Chicago tweak his proposal, because they don't need COWL as much as they did when the first contract was set up.

I shit you not, there's more than 1 page devoted to the back and forth contract negotiations, and it's dry as fuck. I mean I get it, I understand, and it's a mildly interesting "What If?" but not to sustain a whole series...

Of course it also doesn't help that the main heroes of COWL we meet are a mixture of burnouts, assholes, bullies, and an objectified woman. The closest thing to a 'good guy' are the 2 guys without powers; one has a son who thinks he's a loser because of it, and the other is a former spy who thinks that something fishy is going on within COWL...

Of course, there is, and it's not too hard to figure it out, and it's not a spoiler to reveal...(someone inside COWL is trying to prop up the remaining villains so that COWL will still be relevant and can have a better negotiating position with the city...ya.) WOW that's a blast of exciting reading yes?)

At one point, COWL even goes on Strike...so superheroes are walking the picket line. Those that aren't are going on vendetta missions against the remaining organized crime figures, which is OK, because they secretly have some powered individuals working for them, one of whom kicked the shit out of the COWL

dude with the son...

So it's all murky, everyone is degrees of grey, and everyone turns on everyone when you think they are actually working together. There's too many clichés here, including the Uncle Tom #2 in command Black guy who the White boss treats like his lackey.

It was a mildly interesting proposition, but when your intro pages include a map of all the city locations and districts (why?) and the roster of main characters, it just feels like extra info thrown at you so you'll know/care more? I mean if it's good, won't you be able to figure it out on your own? The writer even knew it was hard to follow who's who at the start, so that's why you got the handy dandy guide...

This was a misfire that started to circle the drain when it got into union contracts and negotiation techniques...it feels like a fairly boring 80s TV episode from Magnum PI or Murder She Wrote, about a union boss trying to prop up his union and having it all fall apart and be unraveled.

I'd miss this one, because it's not really all that pleasant, or good. I tried, I really did, but it's not half as interesting as the premise or cover made it look. I did want to know about some characters, but there were too many of them, and things spread out too much, so we didn't get enough background or info on any of them (there is a dossier file on each at the end of the volume, if you care to know any more, and that info would have been more interesting to put into the book than strikes and labour unions...).

At the end of the day, it's not original enough, nor is the art good enough or memorable enough to make it relevant. I don't need happy sunshine, but I'd rather if it's going to be dark/grim that it at least be GOOD and well written. These just feel like a bunch of stereotypes thrown together and ruined by some bad decisions. I won't be following the rest of this series (which has only produced 4 more issues since Sept 2014).

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