

The Ultimate Brick

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

The Ultimate Brick is a detailed look at one of the most basic characteristics of the HERO System - Strength. Arguably one of the basic stable characteristics of any RPG. One of the reasons being it's the most easily measurable and comparable characteristic to real life. As the introduction points out we have countless contests and measurements for how strong the human being can get, how much weight objects can hold, etc. And of course the idea of the "brick" dates back to ancient times in fiction.

I've owned this particular book since it hit gaming stores, in fact I remember checking daily for the thing to arrive on the shelf. As gamers go I never really sat down and played a strait strong man, Brick to borrow a comic book term as the title does. Mostly because they always seemed so, well, mundane. So I picked this up and immediately set into it to get some gaming goodness out of the covers. I've found it to be an excellent resource of ideas.

Chapter One - Building The Brick. We start out with a lengthy discussion on the Strength Characteristic, detailing it's various aspects such as lifting, throwing, and damaging things. We get a number of useful tables in the first section: Modifiers for lifting, a massively expanded STR Table (from -50 STR to 200), and a throwing table. As well as a short discussion on Leaping and the effects of Negative Strength in Hero. That's the first twelve pages of the book. The next section goes into the backgrounds, personalities, archetypes and a overview of bricks in several different genre's of gaming. The section does an excellent job of not centering too much on the comic book style brick, which is arguably the most common (or at the least the one that comes to mind first). After that the chapter goes into the other Characteristics in the Hero System as they pertain to bricks, Skills, various notes on Powers, and other Hero Mechanical things. The section on Disadvantages is the most useful outside the Hero System. The chapter wraps up with a decent number of Power builds for various Brick Tricks (as the book calls them), which is mostly what I was after when I bought the book: various ways to get creative with a brick character and the STR Characteristic. And I wasn't disappointed, a number of write-ups have found their way onto some characters as well as fueled my imagination on making the basic Strength Based Character a little more interesting that "I walk up to it and hit it with my fist."

Chapter Two - Smashing Fists & Bouncing Bullets. Chapter two is an extensive discussion on high Strength scores and combat maneuvers. The chapter opens up with Stopping Moving Objects, and gives us some good Hero Rules for bricks to use to stop the train before it falls off the cliff (or whatever fast moving object needs stopping). After that it goes into extended or alternate takes on

the Hero System's basic combat maneuvers. The Grab maneuver gets the most space with about four pages dedicated to it. Then we get into some other combat effects such as using other characters as weapons, the Fast Ball Special attack, heavy bricks and leaving footprints in concrete, and crushing damage. The next section is Bricks And The Environment. Here we get some discussion on the masses of various objects, and an expanded discussion on breaking things. Such as breaking parts of things, breaking things into pieces and tearing things off of other things. We also get a six page expanded objects table that gives the DEF and BODY of a large number of things in Hero terms; which is useful in any type of game where damage is being done to the environment, personally I love this giant table. There is a discussion on "Living In A Fragile World" which talks about how to adjust your game so things are easier to break and damage should one want a campaign with a very high collateral damage quotient. Next up is "Realistic Uses Of Strength" which goes into trying to fit very high STR into a more realistic frame of reference (personally I found this silly, if you're already in the realm where lifting several tons is possible why bring in "realistic" at all?) Useful I'm sure for those wishing for realistic uses of unrealistic STR, I found it extraneous. Lastly the chapter goes into the effects of high, low and zero gravity environments and their effects on Strength and uses of Strength. The finally part of the chapter is a very short section with five classic brick Plot Seeds, always useful for adventure ideas.

Chapter Three - A Pile Of Bricks. The final chapter gives us ten example characters. Divided into two section: Superheroic Bricks and Heroic Bricks. Superheroic Bricks has four characters, the first two are rewrites of Grond and Ogre from Conquerors, Killers, And Crooks using some of the powers found in the book. The other two are brand new brick characters to put against your Superhero Team, the last White Rhino being the most interesting of the four Super Bricks presented. Heroic Bricks is six Heroic Level brick characters. Caber works well for a Dark Champions/Street Level game. Burgida is an example Fantasy Hero character, a half-giantess warrior. Sygyl is another Fantasy Hero character, this one a mage whose magic focuses on tattoos that grant feats of physical prowess. Johnny Kwon is a Ninja Hero example of a martial artists brick, a tough street fighter with a desire to fight more than anything. Bill Ferguson is a Pulp Hero brick, the classic two-fisted adventurer type. Last is Dashana a Star Hero brick, an alien from a matriarchal society that values strength and aggression over anything else.

The last eleven pages of the book reprint all the various tables from the chapters: expanded Strength table, object table, mass table and throwing tables as well as a few others for easy reference.

The Downside:

If the book has one down side it's that it is the shortest of all the Ultimate Series books. The focus, on Strength alone, seems a very narrow band. It would have been nice to see greater discussion on various other types of "bricks" such as the unstoppable monster (Strength may be normal, but you just can't put them down), and the other physical Characteristics: Body and Constitution. There's a potentially wide field for The Tough Guy in the RPG game, and I think focusing almost completely on Strength and it's effects short changed the book a bit.

The Otherside:

Chapter two is completely useless to non-hero gamers, as is most of chapter one with the Hero Power Write-ups. But the first part of Chapter one, specifically the discussion on personality and archetypes is good for anyone looking to play the teams Strong Man. Chapter three's characters are interesting and who can't use a few more NPCs? Overall though, there isn't too much appeal here for the non-Hero Gamer.

Overall, this is a pretty decent book. I got a lot of use out of it for a solid year as I explored it's pages

in creating a few Brick characters and playing them. As I said, broadening the discussion beyond simple feats of Strength would go a long way to making this an excellent book, but compared to later Ultimate Series books it looks a bit narrow in scope. Would I recommend this book? Definitely, it's good for what it provides and the expanded information in Chapter Two can make just about any Hero System combat a bit more interesting, especially for brawlers and other hand to hand fighters that don't use martial arts - giving you a large number of interesting combat options beyond hitting things.

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