

Champions Of The North

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

Champions Of The North is a setting book for the Champions Universe from Hero Games detailing Canada. The source book provides an overall look at Canada and ties it into the Champions Universe, though loosely enough that you can use it mostly as a general look at Canada with Superheroes.

Chapter One - A History Of Heroism. Chapter one is a history of Canada from the earliest days of European settlers to modern times. It touches on all the major events that formed the country from it's early roots, and as it reaches the twentieth century starts to tie in the pulp-adventurers and eventually true Superheroes to its past. If you're not familiar with Canada or are looking for some information to make a long standing Legacy Hero (even for a Pulp campaign) this is a good crash course.

Chapter Two - The Canada Gazetteer. This is the heart of the book, and provides most of the information you need to run an campaign, or even a story arc, in Canada. The first part, Canada, looks at the country itself, provinces, and cities. Each one provides major features, holidays, local people and media outlets, and a host of other details to help bring each part of the country to life. Law looks mostly at Canada's relationship with Superheroes and its various organizations, covering the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), military, UNTILs pretense, and some organized crime groups in Canada. Trade and Commerce is short but provides some information on Canada's economic state. Sports looks at Canada's past times, with a large section on Ice Hockey. Canadian Culture looks at the rest of Canada's aspects, movies, music, and others arts. The last part of the chapter looks at Canada's own mysticism, the Aboriginal World. This looks at the various First Nation (or Native American) cultures and their beliefs regarding the land and their own legends. It provides write-ups for several First Nation mythological creatures, while written for a Heroic Level game (making them perfect for Pulp or Urban Fantasy) it provides information on raising them to Super level threats.

Chapter Three - Gamemastering Canada. First thing this chapter looks at is Canadian Stereotypes, what they are and ways to use them without abusing them. The Canadian Campaign is some advice on where to set a campaign centered on Canada, extremely useful if you're not actually from Canada. It looks at possible locations, themes, villains, and how to use local color so it feels more like Canada. Canada Amok is an adventure scenario called The Road Trip. It's intended to get PCs outside Canada to visit the country, and provides several hooks to get the Players to do so, the Vacation, The Pursuit And Retrieval of a fleeing villain, and The Walkabout (usually involving only on Player Character and best used as a solo adventure). These three hooks are used to provide not only an adventure in Canada but to have the Player's Team meet with a Canadian Team - and in classic comic book fashion

probably fight on their very first meeting, so there's a section on Hero vs Hero conflict, how to start it, how to play it out and finally how to end it with the Reconciliation Scene (either on good, neutral, or bad terms depending on the campaign). For the actual reasons themselves a group may want to enter Canada there are Ten Unusual Road Trip Scenarios For American Superheroes in Canada, which is a list of actual hooks to use the previous sections ideas and frameworks with. Ten Ways For Bad Guys To Conquer Canada is perfect for those Master Villains bent on world domination and want to use Canada as their spring board. Ten Interesting Canadian Locations And Legends is actually eleven (there's one in the side bar) places and stories you can use as the seed for an adventure lasting a session or two focused on local color.

With all this it shouldn't be hard to figure out a way to involve Canada, if even for a short story arc, in an ongoing Campaign.

Chapter Four - Canada In The Champions Universe. While the rest of the book has a focus on the Champions Universe it's presented in a mostly neutral tone to make it easy to fit Canada into any existing campaign. This chapter looks at aspects directly related to the stock Champions Universe Setting from Hero Games. The GM's vault contains more plot seeds (most of them focused on major cities and locations than people), and some behind the scenes information. The last part of the book are Canadian specific Superheroes and Supervillains. Three Solo Heroes and one five person Hero Team are presented, along with plot seeds. Several of them are tied directly to the Canadian Mystic Forces of Land, Ice, Sea and Air. These four entities (more primeval force than actual individual) are responsible for much of the lands Supers in some way or another. Canadian Villains provides a bunch of enemies for your game. The Hunter-Patriots are a Canadian villain organization that are bent on an independent Western Canada. There are three Master Villains written-up. Baron Nihil is an ex-NAZI who was transformed into an energy being and managed to conquer an alternate Earth dimension and is now making overtures at his home dimension. Borealis is a Canadian Super-Patriot (so much so he crosses over into villainy instead of Heroism), and his two lieutenants Augury and The Landsman. Necrull is an immortal being that requires fresh bodies to keep himself alive, and has created a small but very deadly organization based around his own macabre form of immortality, he's good for a much darker campaign. Lastly six Solo Villains are present, and most of these do have some tie-in to the underlying mystic conflict between Land and Ice.

The whole source book is a good presentation of Canada for use by those who don't live there, giving enough information run at least stories in Canada, if not whole campaigns.

The Downside:

There are only a few small things missing from this Champions source book that are found in most others. Usually a setting book includes parts like The Espionage World, The Mystic World, The Mercenary World, The Martial World, and similar that provides collected information on the common subcultures in the Champions Universe and most games. While a lot of that information is present in this book it is mostly scattered throughout (for instance there's a small section on Criminal organizations under Law in Chapter Two, but doesn't cover possible mercenaries operating out of Canada).

One of the coolest underlying themes in the book is the conflict between the ancient entities of Land and Ice. While it gets a lot of cursory information, especially when Champions Universe specific aspects are mentioned, I think more could have been done to tie this fictional but very cool concept into the history of Canada itself. After all a real world history can be found in books, but a fictional history for use in a Superhero game is harder to come by.

The Otherside:

Given the books mostly neutral overtones in using Canada as either the center of a campaign or in the campaign in more detail I can easily recommend this for anyone wanting a little more information on Canada, even if you're not in a Superhero Campaign.

It's an excellent source book over all and does an awesome job of bringing the Great White North to life. If you're looking to make Canada more than "just that country above the United States" this is the source book you want.

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