

The Algernon Files 2.0

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

The following review was done from the Hero System version of the book.

The Algernon Files is first a character book for an as yet unpublished setting. Containing eighty-one full character sheets and well over two dozen minions, bases, vehicles and minor characters. It is broken into three chapters, Introduction, Allies, and Villains. The latter two chapters are further broken down into organizations and independents. The end of the book contains a time-line for the Blackwyrms Games Universe and a short section on a War between two great alien races that underlines a lot of the background to the setting.

Chapter One - Introduction. The chapter is only a few pages, giving an introduction to the book. It also has a sample character sheet explaining the layout of the rest of the book.

Chapter Two - Allies. The first part are Hero Teams and Organizations. There are four altogether. The first is The Sentinels, the primary Hero Team in the Blackwyrms Games setting. The team itself is a legacy, still lead in the background by Doc Steele (see The Fires Of War). Many of the members are also legacy characters themselves, making for a team with an interesting and varied background. The next team is the most interesting, The Aerie. A bird themed group of four members who are a bit mercenary in their dealings, accepting money for good deeds but are still firmly on the side of the good guys. The team dynamic with that group is by far the most interesting for potential roleplay, having a leader that grates on most people, even his own teammates, but still trying to do good in the world. The third group is The Arsenal, a government sponsored group that fills the role of arrogant government lackeys well as a team, but as individuals tend to come off a bit softer, providing a good hook for roleplaying with the government types in your game. The last group is the organization The Covenant which maintains it's own group of mystic supers as well. The Covenant is the mystic good organization should your campaign have a good amount of magic in it this is a good inclusion. The groups are inventive and the dynamics keeping them together varied and interesting.

The second part of the chapter contains Independent heroes. It's a short section containing only six characters. A few of them are legacy heroes, having heroing in their family for generations. The most interesting of the lot is Film Noir, a movie character from noir detective movie come to life, which is a cool twist for a character.

A good selection of characters to choose from, but most of them belong to teams or a legacy of heroes, making them a bit harder to drop straight into your campaign as written, but certainly not impossible.

Chapter Three - Enemies. Again we have four groups in the first part. The Black Knights are a ruthless batch of mercenaries almost intent on causing as much mayhem as possible as they are on making money. This is a very bloody and ruthless group, and not appropriate for campaigns that don't want a high body count. The next group is the Hells Belles, and really aren't villains. An all female rock group these supers are more a good bit of background flavor for any game, a bit light hearted and certainly on the wrong side of the law enough to cause a bit of mayhem for your players. Next is The Prometheans, the premiere master-villain group, indeed each member of the group could be a master villain for a short run in a campaign, taken altogether and you have the main foil for the Sentinels in the setting. The last group in the first part is The Sinister Circle, a group with an ever changing roster, which makes it easy to remove and add villains as needed to suit your game. As presented the group is another one that you really only want to include if you desire a body count in your Champions games.

The next part is Independents, twenty-five solo villains for your game. Ranging from Master Villain status all the way to henchman status. All of them are pretty decent write-ups of characters. There are a wide range of personalities and a decent range of special abilities to keep your players occupied. The only thing I noticed was that, from a mechanics point of view, the point totals tended to be very high for a standard Champions game. Some of this can easily be explained as the write-ups tend to place a heavier emphasis on skills than most Champions games do, but not all of it. There seemed to be a tendency to try and make many of the villains jack-of-all-trades types, many seem very self sufficient, which can limit their use in a game as there's little reason for many to work together, or use each other, as written. It's not to say they aren't unbalanced, each could probably hold their own against a team of players, but that only works if your game involves going from one villain to the next.

Is it a good book? Yes, I'd say it is. A decent enough collection of characters to include in your game, though removing the setting specific information might take a bit of work as many of the characters seem closely tied to both each other and the setting.

The Downside:

As I was reading the book I kept coming across the description of "super humanly strong and a fast healer" or variations on that phrase a lot. I couldn't help but think about halfway through the book that there were a large number of strong regenerating characters in this book and setting. It made for a bit of tedious redundancy in the characters as I read on.

As I read through the book I did notice a lot of characters have long histories, or connections to previous generations of heroes and villains. This tendency towards legacy characters can make it a bit harder to drop them as is strait into your home campaign. Though it does make for a very strong setting resource.

Also, for as much as this counts as I don't consider it a big deal, as I read the book over several days the covers warped considerably as I kept the book open for an hour or more at a time reading it over. Something I've always found annoying in many gaming books.

The Otherside:

Being a character book the appeal outside the Hero System is immediate, eighty-one heros and villains plus a host of support characters, vehicles and bases to take advantage of. There is a Mutants & Masterminds 2 version of the book as well, so you don't even have to convert if you're using that system.

Final thoughts, this book would be a strong supplement to a full setting book for the universe it talks about. You can take the many characters and file off the serial numbers for your own games, but it might take a bit of work to do so for the good number of legacy characters contained in it. Overall, a good solid collection of characters to use in your game, a bit pricey for what it is though. The PDF version is a good price for the book.

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