

INTRODUCTION



"UP in the sky — look!" Those words opened each of the seventeen *Superman* short films produced by the animation studio of Max and Dave Fleischer in the 1940s. Spoken as if by an everyday man glimpsing something astonishing in the air above, they made it clear to the audience that it would soon witness uncommon wonders.

And it was true. In each entry in that groundbreaking cartoon series, audiences witnessed Superman, the first and arguably most popular of all the costumed superhumans, using the powers that were his alien birthright to battle giant robots, natural and unnatural disasters, enemy spies, and supernatural monsters.

These cartoons were, of course, passive entertainment. The members of the audience could imagine they were the superhero, accomplishing remarkable feats of strength and daring, but those were solitary imaginings, seldom shared, inevitably forgotten. With the *HERO System*, the audience becomes a set of participants, and the superhero up on the big screen is transformed into a more personal alter ego — one designed to give the player the experience he could only imagine previously, and to share that experience with others in a collaborative story.

Champions is a *HERO System* genre book — a book of guidelines, advice, and rules to help you use the *HERO System* to create Superhero characters and run Superhero campaigns in the style of your favorite comic books — or, if your tastes lean toward other sources of Superhero adventure, of cartoons, movies, television shows, radio shows, or movie serials.

As a genre book, *Champions* does not include the *HERO System* rules. You can find those in *The HERO System 6th Edition* two-rulebook set (or, if you want to start with a streamlined version of the rules, try *The HERO System Basic Rulebook*).

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Champions is designed both for players experienced with Superhero roleplaying and those who are new to this style and genre of play. Nothing in these pages is secret or for the GM's eyes only, so you can read it all and then decide which portions you want to utilize.

Chapter One, *Truth, Justice, And The American Way: The Superhero Genre*, describes what Superhero comic books, and the campaigns based on them, are like. Players who are familiar with comics can skip this chapter initially if they want to, since they already know many of the genre conventions it describes. But they should return to it eventually — even experienced comics readers can learn something here, and it has good advice on how to implement genre conventions using the *HERO System*. Players who aren't familiar with Superhero comic books should definitely read Chapter One.

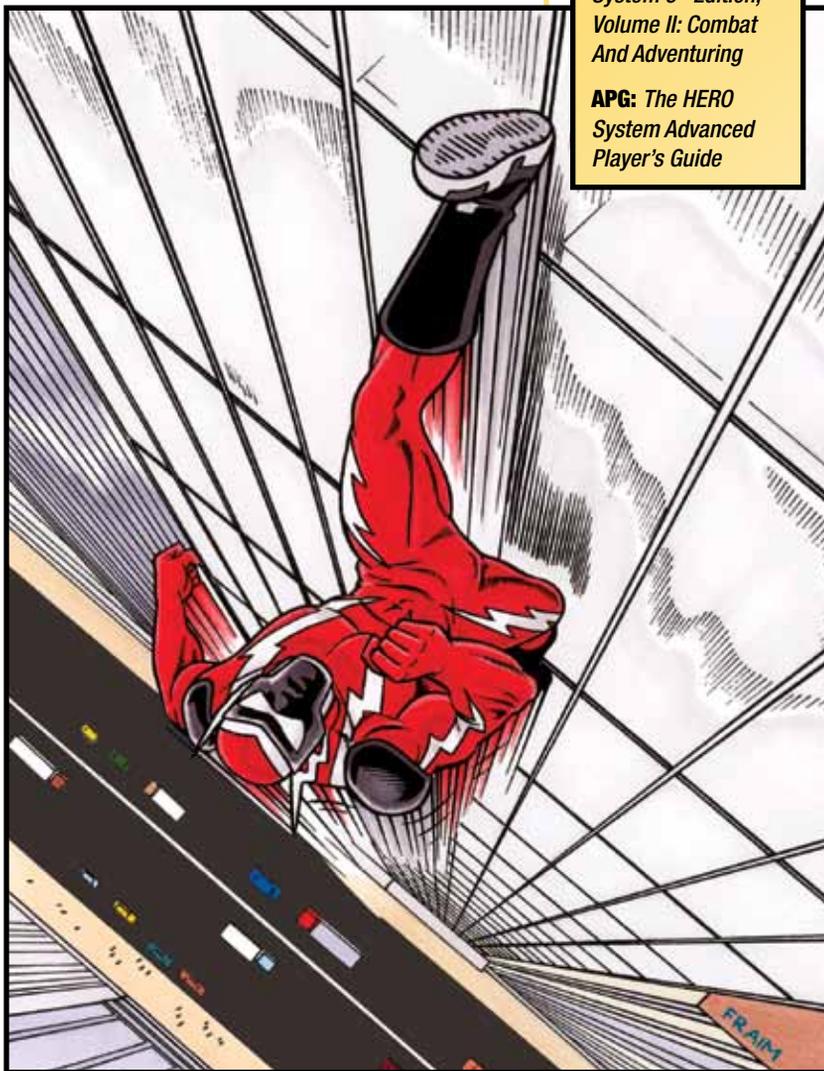
ABBREVIATIONS

This book uses the following abbreviations to refer to other *HERO System* books:

6E1: *The HERO System 6th Edition, Volume I: Character Creation*

6E2: *The HERO System 6th Edition, Volume II: Combat And Adventuring*

APG: *The HERO System Advanced Player's Guide*



Chapter Two, *With Great Power...: Superhero Character Creation*, talks about using the *HERO System* rules to build Superhero characters. It discusses what it means to be superhuman, the various types of origin stories that explain how heroes and villains get their powers, and the main superhuman archetypes (including a few sample powers to get you started). Then it goes over the *HERO System* game elements — Skills, Powers, Complications, and more — and discusses their special applications in the Superheroes genre. It concludes with a review of superteams and how to use them in your game.

Chapter Three, *...Comes Great Responsibility: Gamemastering Champions*, as is evident from its title, includes advice for GMs of Superhero campaigns. But even players with no interest in running a campaign should give this chapter a look, if only to have an idea of what the GM may expect of them and what they should expect of their GM.

Chapter Four, *The Champions*, provides a few examples from the *Champions Universe*, the official *Champions* campaign setting of Hero Games, to get you started. It includes writeups for a complete superhero team, the Champions, as well as their base, vehicle, and several of their enemies. Its members can serve as examples of character designs for players who are still new to the rules. In addition, its members might end up as NPCs in your own campaign, if the GM so wishes.

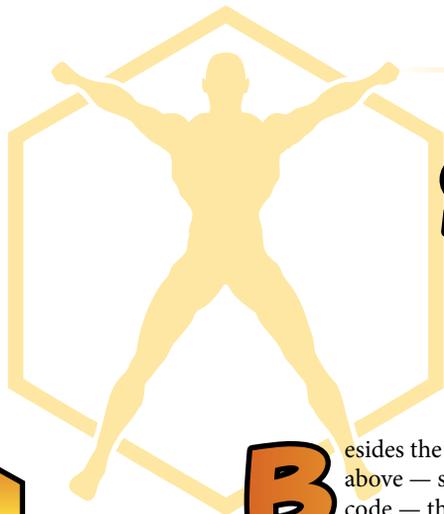
Chapter Five, *The Champions Sourcebook*, continues Chapter Four's approach by providing a wide variety of resources for Superhero players and GMs. It includes a section of gadgets organized by type, and example Bases and Vehicles for superheroes. Next comes the *Superhero Gallery*

— 20 different common types of superhumans, such as a Fire-based character or a Telekinetic. Each character has a two-page spread with a basic character sheet and pre-built abilities that you can “plug in” to that sheet. This allows a player to easily create a PC if he needs one, and the GM to quickly generate dozens of supervillains for the PCs to fight. Lastly, Chapter Five concludes with character sheets for generic minions and adversaries the PCs might encounter.

Taken all together, *Champions* provides a handy jumping-off point for your own adventures. This book, like many Hero Games products, is a toolkit — one addressing a particular genre. Rather than telling you the One True Way of doing something, it typically discusses the options and alternatives (to make you aware of them), and then lets *you* decide how to implement something in your game or build a particular power. Ultimately the most important ingredient in the mix isn't anything in this book, it's *your* imagination and creativity.

As with every other set of rules and recommendations related to the *HERO System*, you should remember two important things: first, if you're putting together your own campaign, you should adopt any rules that help you have fun and abandon those that don't; second, if you know enough about the game to question something in this book, you also probably know enough to change it to your satisfaction.

So fetch your impossibly bright, ridiculously bulletproof underwear from the dryer and prepare to have some fun!



SUPERHERO ELEMENTS

1 Besides the two major elements discussed above — superpowers and the heroic code — there are many other elements, themes, tropes, and “bits” that characterize the Superhero genre no matter what subgenre or time period’s involved. Superhero campaigns wouldn’t be much like the comic books if they didn’t implement these genre conventions — things that don’t normally happen in real life, and that often don’t make much sense, but that are all part of making comic books what they are. This section discusses many of them and how you can simulate them in a *HERO System* campaign.

The “rules” described here detail the way things work in the comic books, and players who are readers of the comics will probably expect these genre conventions to hold true for a Champions campaign. If the GM disallows any of these comic book conventions — for example, maybe he thinks the rule about any mask, no matter how small, being sufficient to conceal a character’s identity is stupid — he should tell his players before the campaign starts so they’ll know to take a different approach to that particular issue.

SECRET IDENTITY NAMES

When you’re creating a Champions character, give some thought to his real name. A good *nom du crime-fighting* is important, but a good secret identity name helps make the character feel more “dramatically real” and exciting. Some suggestions:

- use alliteration, which makes the name easier to remember and say (examples: Peter Parker, Clark Kent, Matt Murdock, Wally West, Scott Summers, Reed Richards, Lex Luthor, Dan Dreiberg, Guy Gardner)
- use short names — one or two syllables each — which have a dramatic sound and are, again, easier to remember (examples: Bruce Wayne, Steve Rogers, Tony Stark, Hal Jordan)
- avoid long or difficult to pronounce names unless they fit a character’s cultural background (for example, unless your character’s a Cajun and you want to emphasize that in roleplaying, you probably shouldn’t consider names like Thibodeaux and Delacroix)

SECRET IDENTITIES, MASKS, AND COSTUMES

Most superheroes and supervillains maintain *Secret Identities* — when they use their superpowers, they do so while wearing a costume that conceals their true features, and call themselves by a distinctive codename that’s different from their given names. In many superhero worlds, this habit came about in the era of the Pulp heroes (see page 23), when heroes sometimes operated outside the law. Those heroes generally concealed their true features behind dark overcoats, floppy hats, and concealing masks or scarves, and used frightening-sounding code-names. These habits made it harder for organized crime or law enforcement to punish the heroes (or their loved ones) for their crimefighting activities. When crimefighting moved into the realm of the superpowered, such practices carried over.

In *HERO System* terms, Secret Identity is a form of Social Complication (see 6E1 428). Typically it’s worth 15 Matching Complications Points for a Frequently, Major Complication. However, if the character has a lot of enemies who want to harm or kill him, it might rise to Severe and be worth 20 points. (However, since almost every superhero has plenty of enemies, the baseline for what counts as “a lot” of them rises significantly — qualifying for a Severe Secret Identity in a Champions campaign may be far more trouble than it’s worth!) On the other hand, if the GM doesn’t want to introduce Secret Identity-related elements into the campaign very often, it may become an Infrequently-occurring Complication worth only 10 points (or less).

WHAT THE SECRET IDENTITY IS FOR

Superheroes don’t conceal their identities on a whim — they have reasons for doing so that make dramatic sense within a Superhero story. Any character who takes a Social Complication: Secret Identity should tell the GM what its primary purpose is. The GM can then use the Secret Identity to generate plots and subplots for the campaign.



THE CHAMPIONS

Membership: Defender, Ironclad, Kinetik, Sapphire, Witchcraft.

Background/History: The Champions began as a gleam in the eye of a wealthy and talented young man named James Harmon IV. Inspired to fight crime and villainy by the destruction of Detroit, Harmon used his intellect to design and build a suit of powered armor. Christening himself *Defender*, he enjoyed some success as a superhero in his hometown of New York City. But after being defeated by a skilled team of VIPER supervillains, Defender realized he needed both a fresh start and some teammates of his own.

Since New York already had several super-teams, in 2001 Harmon moved to Millennium City. Though full of superhuman activity, the “City of the Future” didn’t yet have a superteam of its own, and he decided it was time for that state of affairs to change. With the blessing of the city fathers, he called a press conference to announce his arrival in Millennium City and put out the word — he was looking for a group of like-minded individuals willing to band together to protect the city from Mechanon, VIPER, and anything else that might threaten its safety and security.

It didn’t take long to get a response. Almost before the press conference had ended, he got a call from Sapphire’s agent, asking if she could try out for the team. To this day Defender isn’t entirely sure whether she got involved partly as a publicity stunt, but neither he nor any of the other Champions can deny her passion for helping others, or her dedication to duty. After talking with her, Defender made her the first member.

After rejecting a few other superheroes whose attitudes, powers, or personal circumstances didn’t suit the team he had in mind, Defender walked into his office one evening to find the mysterious crimefighter known as Nighthawk sitting there waiting for him. Like Defender, Nighthawk had discovered there were criminals he couldn’t handle on his own. Any man who could get past his security systems interested Defender, and it didn’t take long for him to discover that Nighthawk, though somewhat more intense than most superheroes, would make a valuable teammate. Now they were three, and the newly-allied heroes, after some discussion, chose to name themselves *the Champions*.

Notable victories against VIPER and Firewing in 2001 brought the Champions favorable attention, but it was a different sort of threat — a crashing starship — that brought them their fourth member. When they got a report of an out-of-control space vessel heading toward the city, they joined up with some other heroes to divert the craft. It was flying too fast for them to stop, so they did the only thing they could: they knocked it off-course and right into Lake St. Clair. The impact destroyed the ship, and they feared the pilot was dead... until Ironclad waded ashore. Grateful for their help, Ironclad became an informal ally of the heroes of Millennium City for several weeks, but then accepted Defender’s invitation to join the Champions.

An almost-deadly encounter with the minions of Takofanes the Undying Lord during the Halloween season of 2001 left Defender and his teammates painfully aware they lacked any sort of mystic expertise. As luck — or perhaps fate? — would have it, Witchcraft showed up at their headquarters the next week. After several years of fighting crime informally, she’d decided it was time to dedicate herself to the struggle against evil full-time. She was a perfect fit, both temperamentally and powers-wise, and the other four didn’t hesitate to vote her in.

At that point, the group’s membership stabilized for several years. Although none of them were as experienced as most members of the Justice Squadron or the Sentinels, the Champions soon established a notable record as skilled crimefighters, and in time their power and professionalism grew. The list of their accomplishments during the first decade of the twenty-first century is a long one: defeating newly-arisen master villains such as Interface and King Cobra; preventing Black Paladin and Talisman from taking over Witchcraft’s body to resurrect a powerful medieval witch; fending off Mechanon’s attack on Millennium City in a fifty foot-tall body; battling the evil mentalists of PSI; an attack by Cybermind on Defender; and even being transported to an alternate dimension to team up with heroes from another world to battle Dr. Destroyer and other villains in the so-called “Reality Storm.” Recently the team cemented its reputation as the premiere defenders of Millennium City by fighting off an invasion by the alien Qularr and preventing



GADGETS

Gadgets” refers to any sort of gear, equipment, or devices a Superheroes character might carry (as opposed to Vehicles, Bases, and the like, which are covered later in this chapter).

WEAPONS

Weapons are a major part of Superhero-world technology — and weapons that allow a normal person to affect a super (or even just to leave him with the mistaken impression that he can) are among the most common types found. Some examples follow.



BLASTER PISTOL

Effect: Blast 8d6

Target: One character

Duration: Instant

Range: 400m

Charges: 2 clips of 12 Charges

Breakability: 8 PD/ED

Description: The blaster pistol is a staple of Superhero environments, though often it’s not powerful enough to do real harm to a superhero. It is, in essence, a handgun that fires energy charges (so it has special effects far more interesting than those of a real-world firearm), but otherwise functions much like ordinary pistols. Villainous agencies often make use of blaster pistols, and each agency’s specific design is unique.

Here’s a typical blaster pistol using pulson technology, with several options so you can customize it. Each type is shown in a Blast configuration, but you can substitute an equivalent number of DCs of Ranged Killing Attack for the same cost.

Game Information: Blast 8d6 (40 Active Points); OAF (-1), 2 clips of 12 Charges (-0). Total cost: 20 points.

Options:

- 1) *Strong Blaster Pistol:* Increase to Blast 9d6. 45 Active Points; total cost 22 points
- 2) *Weak Blaster Pistol:* Decrease to Blast 6d6. 30 Active Points; total cost 15 points.

- 3) *Auto-Blaster Pistol:* This form of the Blaster Pistol can fire five-shot bursts. Reduce to Blast 6d6 and add Autofire (5 shots; +½) and 4 clips of 32 Charges each (+½). 60 Active Points; total cost 30 points.
- 4) *Focused Pulson Beam:* This version of the Blaster Pistol uses magnetic fields to more tightly focus the pulson beam, resulting in a more intense impact. Add Armor Piercing (+¼). 50 Active Points; total cost 25 points.
- 5) *Wide-Beam Blaster Pistol:* The focusing lens in the barrel of this form of the Blaster Pistol spreads the beam out significantly with no loss of power. Add Area Of Effect (1m Radius; +¼). 50 Active Points; total cost 25 points.



BLASTER RIFLE

Effect: Blast 10d6

Target: One character

Duration: Instant

Range: 620m

Charges: 30 Charges

Breakability: 12 PD/ED

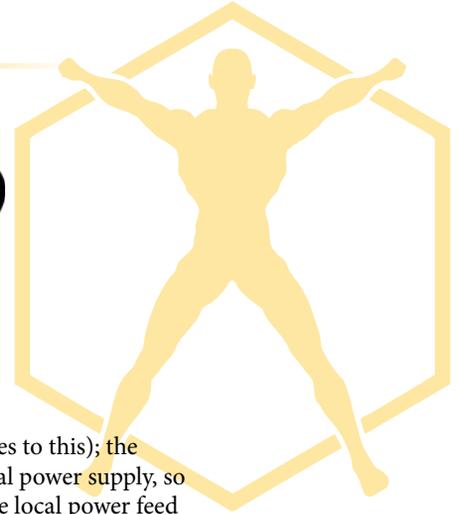
Description: Blaster rifles, functionally, are more than scaled-up versions of blaster pistols. They’re a super-agent’s primary weapons rather than backup weapons. As with the Blaster Pistols, you can substitute Killing Damage for Normal Damage at the rate of 1 DC for 1 DC and keep the same cost structure.

Game Information: Blast 10d6, 30 Charges (+¼) (62 Active Points); OAF (-1). Total cost: 31 points.

Options:

- 1) *Strong Blaster Rifle:* Increase to Blast 12d6. 75 Active Points; total cost 37 points.
- 2) *Weak Blaster Rifle:* Decrease to Blast 8d6. 50 Active Points; total cost 25 points.
- 3) *More Clips:* Change to 2 clips of 30 Charges each (+½). 75 Active Points; total cost 37 points.
- 4) *Focused Blaster Beam:* Add Armor Piercing (+¼). 75 Active Points; total cost 37 points.
- 5) *Wide-Beam Blaster Rifle:* Add Area Of Effect (1m Radius; +¼). 75 Active Points; total cost 37 points.

BASES AND VEHICLES



Weapons and force-fields aren't the only technology superheroes need. Most superteams have a headquarters (secret or otherwise) that they call home, and a vehicle or two to get them to the scene of the crime.

SUPERHERO BASES

Bases and headquarters — homes and/or operations centers to superheroes, supervillains, super-agents, master criminals, master spies, and world-affecting wannabes — are a staple of superhero campaigns and comics. This section provides some example Superhero bases and related equipment; feel free to modify them to suit your superteam, campaign, or personal preferences. For further information about creating Bases using the *HERO System* rules, see *The Ultimate Base*.

URBAN BASE

This is an example of a modest superhero/supervillain base situated within the city.

This base is comparatively small; it has enough room for living quarters for team members, office and lab space for members and employees, a small garage/hangar for vehicles, and so on. It's not set up to house a full-sized team jet, a major training facility, or the like.

This is a hidden and underground base, designed to be situated beneath a skyscraper, a city park, or the like. Its exits to the world above are secret ones, such as a hidden tunnel opening onto a subway track, an elevator exiting into an unused closet of the building above, a ramp leading into a restricted-access corner of a parking garage, and so on. Anyone searching for the base must overcome an 18- Concealment roll. If you want the base to be public, remove that Skill and adjust the base's cost accordingly.

This is a comparatively sturdy base, with 8 PD/8 ED and BODY 10, though it lacks really esoteric defenses such as teleportation shields or dimensional-breach detectors. However, it has a comprehensive system of visual and auditory sensors covering the inside of the base as well as nearby external locations of note

(the base's Concealment applies to this); the sensors have their own internal power supply, so they keep operating even if the local power feed and the Backup Generator are cut off or destroyed.

The relatively low total cost of the base means the facility is affordable even by novice teams. The total cost to the team is 28 points divided among all the team members. The team must pay for its computer and staff (Followers), if any, separately.

UNDERWATER BASE

This base, located deep beneath the surface of any major body of water, is larger and more functional than the Urban Base. (For Location purposes it's assumed to be in water that's right next to the campaign city, such as just offshore in a coastal area; for it to be a few miles out from the city (Suburbs) would cost +5 points; to be many miles out (Distant) would cost +10 points.) If built close to a city, it has a tunnel access to the city's surface; if built farther out, the base either needs vehicles capable of transporting team members to distant points relatively quickly, or a powerful teleporter such as the one shown for the Space Base (below).

Unlike the Urban Base, this base has a Cell Block, an area where the team can hold captured villains temporarily. The Cell Block has higher defenses than the rest of the base, and no one can Teleport into or out of it (unless their Teleportation has three or more levels of Armor Piercing). Psychic Energy Insulation in the walls makes it difficult to use Mental Powers in or through the Cell Block. If detainees attempt to escape, the team can use an Artificial Gravity Pinner to make it difficult or impossible for anyone in the Cell Block to move (on the average, a person trapped in the artificial gravity field needs STR 40 to even move).

The base's other major feature is a large training facility designed for superhumans. The "danger room" has high-defense walls, and mounted in and behind the walls are a variety of weapons — they can surround a hero with Darkness, hit him with low-yield Blasts, wrap him up in nets, erect energy walls in front of him, and create holograms of his enemies, teammates, or obstacles around him. It's not enough to hurt most superhumans, but can give them a workout.