

The Ultimate Mentalist

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

The Ultimate Mentalist (TUM) goes into mental powers in the Hero System in detail. Covering the major genre's of Role Playing and how to deal with them in Hero System terms. In brief it covers making Mentalist characters, campaigns and Powers.

A Mentalist is any character whose primary schtick, source of power, or overall theme centers around mental effects like Telepathy, Telekineses, Clairvoyance and any other number of "Powers Of The Mind."

Chapter 1 - Mentalist Characters. Jumping right into it we start with Mentalist Basics, which covers various backgrounds, archetypes and personalities that Mentalist types have throughout the many genre of gaming. It does a good job in a short space of drawing examples from all over to show the different aspects that make up a Mentalist. From there we get a good detailed explanation of the EGO Stat in Hero Gaming, and some notes on other stats as they relate to the Mentalist. Then Skills, in the default Hero Rules there are no EGO Based skills. But this book adds three new skills, all of them EGO Based. Mental variations on Stealth, Disguise and Concealment, all of which are nice touches for campaigns using or centered around Mentalists. There is also a short description of how to use Intellect Skills (INT Based) as a Mentalist. A page on Perks and Talents as applied to this character, and finally the meat of the chapter: Powers. We get expanded rules, optional rules and more detail on the various Mental Powers than the basic rules have. New Advantages, Limitations and applications of the Mental Powers, as well as notes on how Mentalists can use Non-Mental Powers. The chapter ends with a few pages covering Character Disadvantages specific to the Mentalist type.

All in all the Chapter does an excellent job of going over how to deal with Mentalists in a game from the Rules point of view.

Chapter 2 - Mentalist Powers. This is the bulk of the book right here, I counted 275 Power Write ups on a quick count through. The chapter is broken down into various Mental Themes, each Theme is then broken down into Basic Powers, Offensive Powers, Defensive Powers, Movement Powers, Sensory Powers and Miscellaneous Powers (not all themes have all the subcategories). The Themes are: Cybnerkenesis Powers, for controlling computers and machines. Mental Defense Powers, a general section on mental defense. Ego Attack Powers, another fairly general section on attacking mentally. Emotion Control Powers, manipulating others through their emotions. Hyper-Mind Powers, powers revolving around simply being a super fast thinker. Illusion Powers, creating images with your mind. Mental Illusions, projecting images into another persons mind. Mental Projection, the ability to project

your “mental self” (or psyche) onto others. Mind Control, manipulation of others minds. Precognition Powers, focusing on sensing the future or past. Psychic Powers, a collection of Powers primarily intended for Heroic Campaigns (such as Pulp Hero). Sensory Mental Powers, a collection of Mental Senses. Telekinetic Powers, a general section of moving objects with your mind. Telepathy Powers, stated as the “default” category for more Mental Powers this is a catchall theme. Mental Gadgets, which is a number of powers written up to be used as gadgets instead of inborn mental powers.

It's a pretty basic list of write ups to help new players or inspire anyone. Two parts really stand out however. Under Emotion Control there is an Alter/Inflict Emotions Table which covers various modifiers and effects of inflicting or altering four base emotions: Anger, Fear, Love and Sadness to a wide variance of degrees. And some notes on how to use those four for other emotions (such as the Anger section for Hatred). The second item of note that stands out is under Sensory Mental Powers, and is an Aura Table as part of the Aura Vision Write-Up, providing a helpful guideline to any characters “psychic aura.” Which is always fun for flavor in a game. And like all sections of Hero Write ups there are notes on variant versions or how to make a power stronger or weaker.

Chapter 3 - Mentalists Genre By Genre. This is a short chapter with examples of Mentalist characters for each of the major genre's Hero has mentioned. There are four Champions (Superhero) characters, two are rewrites using some of the optional rules in this book of previously introduced villains, and we get two new characters for Champions (one Hero and one Villain). We have one Cyberhero villain, a super solider experiment. A Dark Champions character who is a good example of a Mentalist Character without the classic Mental Powers. Two Fantasy Hero write ups, one a psionic adversary and the other a Psionic beast. A Horror Hero write up of a psychic vampire. A Post-Apocalyptic Hero write up of a villainous cult. A Pulp Hero psychic detective. And finally three Star Hero characters, the first a Psi-Soldier from an alternate time line, a psionic race of aliens and a classic Psionic Science Fiction character. The write ups come with plot seeds as well for most of the characters. And each section has a few paragraphs on appropriate levels of Mental Powers for each genre.

Chapter 4 - Mental Combat. The first part is a general overview of Mental Combat under normal conditions in the Hero System. A few expanded explanations and a sidebar note on how one can speed up the mental aspect of Combat. Then we get to the meat of the chapter: new stuff. First up are Mental Martial Maneuvers. An item that I believe has been a long time coming for Fifth Edition. There is a section regarding adapting Standard Maneuvers in Hero to Mental Combat, then twenty-two Mental Only Maneuvers; 9 Basic Mental Maneuvers anyone can perform and 13 Advanced Mental Maneuvers that work exactly like Martial Maneuvers. After that there is a brief discussion regarding how to add a new Base Characteristic to the Hero System just for Mentalists, Psyche (PSY), and derived stats with a note that this is best suited specifically for Mentalist Campaigns. There is also a section on adapting the current Characteristics specifically to Mental Combat. Then we get a new concept: The Mind Zone. A special “dimension” where only Mental Combat takes place. For those who are having flashes to the nearly game breaking idea of The Speed Zone in The Ultimate Speedster worry not: This one is similar but not the same. The Mind Zone is a mental plane where things occur at “the speed of thought” and only those who have the Enter The Mind Zone Power can interact with each other.

We get some interesting options for running various types of Mental Combat in a game. Most of which can only add to the flavor of the game.

Chapter 5 - Campaigning With Mentalists. The final chapter covers the many aspects of running a Mentalist campaign, or just running a game with Mentalists in them. It starts out with a discussion on the groundwork of Mental Powers in a game. Options on how they work, social issues that may arise, rules considerations when allowing Mental Powers and similar. The first section ends with a walk

through of setting up Psionics in a Star Hero Campaign set in the Terran Empire setting. The second part of the chapter gives some descriptions of various Mentalist Campaign Themes and ideas to run them. It also goes into the various major problems of running games centered around Mentalists, or having a Mentalist in an otherwise non-Mentalist game. It ends the book with a discussion on Mindscapes, the mental landscape that exists only in ones mind.

The Downside:

There's not much of a down side to this book. It's thorough, detailed, well thought out, well organized and clearly presented. The few complains I have are quibbles at best.

Chapter 3, Mentalist Characters. Hero has released three sub-genre books to date (Teen Champions, Galactic Champions, and Dark Champions: The Animated Series), it would have been nice to see examples of characters for those sub genre's. I would have removed one or two of the four Champions write ups to make room for these. Chapter 4, Mental Combat. It would have been a nice touch to give rules for creating Mental Martial Maneuvers the same way that The Ultimate Martial Artists gives rules for Normal Martial Maneuvers. Though the ones presented are pretty thorough in covering all the angles.

The artwork is decent, if a bit sparse. But given the amount and quality of the actual information in the book that's fine by me.

The Otherside:

Given that the Ultimate series focuses on how to run certain tropes in the Hero System there isn't a lot for non-Hero gamers here. Though there are a few choice bits that are good for anyone; the section on Mental Character types and personalities. And the ideas of setting up and running Mentalist/Psionic Campaigns are both good fodder for any gamer to work with.

In conclusion the book is an excellent resource for running Mental based characters or Mental Powers based campaigns. There's no single genre focus to the book, covering all the genre's pretty much equally. If any exists it's possibly towards the Sci-Fi Genre and "Psionics" in a Space Opera campaign. But that's certainly not a focus. There's very little left out when it comes to making and playing with Mentalists and Mental Powers. It's a solid piece of work well worth the price of picking it up. And like all Hero Rule Books there is a comprehensive Index should you need to find anything quickly. The book also includes a good bibliography of source material.

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