

UNTIL Superpowers Database I

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Notes: USPD1 Revised was released in September 2005. It contains updated page references, typo corrections and corrected powers. The USPD2 Appendix contains the same information.

The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Uspide:

The UNTIL Superpowers Database is a giant collection of prebuilt Powers. This was the first fifth edition book of pre-built Powers, and remains the largest single collection. There are forty-two separate categories of Special Effect with a total of seven hundred and forty-two individual write-ups. The book also set the standard for how pre-built Powers would be represented in all books after this one - an easy to read template describing the Powers effects before presented the Hero System write-up.

The introduction presents the book as a report from UNTIL (United Nations Tribunal on International Law - the world's superhuman response force). This is kept up through the book via the illustrations, each bit of art work is framed by a faux computer screen listing the type of Power being used, name of the Superhero using it and a description to go along with the image from the point of view of an UNTIL field agent or other analyzer. Overall, it gives the book a neat piece of structure to elevate it above just a laundry list of Powers.

The side-bars contain a number of optional rules enhancements - mostly in the form of Power Advantages and Adders, introduced early in the history of Fifth Edition. All of these eventually made it into the Revised version of the Fifth Edition rules.

For quick reference here are the additional rules introduced in this book. The Limitation "Inaccurate" and the Telekinesis Adder "Affects Porous" are under Acid Powers. The Movement Advantage "No Turn Mode" is under Air and Wind Powers. The Limitation "Physical Manifestation" is under Force Powers. Several Adders for Clairsentience ("Mobile Perception Points" and "Multiple Perception Points") are under Mental and Psionic Powers. The Limitation "Levitation Only" for Flight is under Telekinetic powers. Two Adders for Change Environment ("Multiple Combat Effects" and "Varying Combat Effects") are under Weather powers.

The Appendix contains two useful items of note. First is a discussion on the Power Skill and various uses for it in a game. This greatly expands the description in the main rules, providing an example of use as well. Second is a How To for using the book itself. It provides two examples - one is the novice player and how they can use and change Powers in the book to create a character, and the second is

a veteran user using the book to create a character in a short amount of time. Both are essentially examples of ways to combine the Powers in the book into a fully built character.

The Special Effect categories for the powers are sub-divided into Offensive, Defensive, Movement, Sensory, and Miscellaneous Powers. Some of the categories have additional sub-categories and a few are divided differently. Below is a simple list of each Special Effect category in the book, noting additional or different sub-categories.

Preceding each section is a short paragraph or two describing the Special Effect in question, giving alternate names (such as cryokinesis for Ice and Cold powers). It also gives some suggestions of other categories that are similar or commonly used in conjunction with each other.

Acid; Air and Wind; Animal (divided into General, Aquatic, Avian, Insect, Mammal, and Reptile powers); Body Control; Cosmic; Cyberkinesis; Darkness; Density; Dimensional; Earth and Stone (with additional sub-categories Crystal, Metal, and Sand); Electricity; Emotion; Fire and Heat (with additional sub-category Smoke); Force (not the Star-Wars Force but a generic Force); Gravity; Hypersenses; Ice and Cold; Illusion; Kinetic Energy; Light; Luck; Magnetism; Matter Manipulation; Mental and Psionic (with additional sub-categories Ego Attack, Mental Illusions, Mind Control, and Telepathy); Precognition; Radiation; Shaper Alteration; Solar and Celestial; Sonic; Speedster; Strength and Toughness; Stretching; Telekinetic; Teleportation; Time; Vibration; Water (with additional sub-category Steam); Weather; Wood and Plant; and Miscellaneous (which is a collection of not easily definable Powers).

Additionally a number of Special Effect categories come with a Basic sub-category; which contains write-ups for wide ranging or the most obvious choice for a given special effect. Using the Darkness Power for the Darkness Special Effect for instance.

The Powers range from simple to complex, giving a good range to choose from. While there are a good number of moderate level builds, especially from the point of view of a veteran player, there are also a number of very interesting builds.

Almost all of the builds also have variations, most of these are "Weak Version" and "Strong Version" which lowers or raises the number of dice used. But some of the variations alter the power in more interesting ways, adding Advantages and Limitations for different effects. A player could take both the basic write-up and the variations to create a more versatile character, making them useful tools for a player looking to make their character stand out.

One of the most important things to keep in mind when using this book is Powers don't exist in a vacuum, they exist within the context of a game. For example under Acid Powers the Immunity Power states it assumes that Acid Damage has a known game maximum to be truly effective. With that in mind one should realize that using anything in the book should be compared to the Campaign they're running. While on the surface that appears to make the book less useful it has the advantage of also letting a GM have the book help set some campaign parameters. Keeping in mind it's knowing how to put a Power together for a desired effect that's more helpful than the number of dice and point cost.

This can be especially useful to the novice GM, given the level of choices the Hero System can provide. Overall the book's usefulness is not just in what Powers are built, but how and the overall way they fit together, the book's powers are all built to interact with each other.

The Downside:

Sometimes the power constructs are a little too basic - I don't think any book of helpful Powers needs

to mention Energy Blast as the most basic way to do damage; much less mention it multiple times under different Special Effects. It could have served itself better with a short discussion of changing Special Effects and dedicated some more space to moderate or complex Power builds.

The Otherside:

Being a big book of Power builds for the Hero System this book has very limited use to the non-Hero gamer. It can serve as help in converting Hero to other systems, or simply as an idea mine for various Superhero concepts.

For the Hero Gamer this is best used in the hands of a novice who needs or wants a lot of examples of how to build various effects with the Hero System rules. Experienced players can use the book as a good source of ideas if they're stuck on a particular concept, or simply as quick character creation using the pre-built powers.

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