

Teen Champions

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| Book Line: | Champions | SKU: | 218 |
| Book Type: | Genre | Formats: | Softcover, PDF |
| Author: | Allen Thomas | Released: | August, 2005 |
| Cost: | 26.99\$ | ISBN: | 1-58366-045-3 |
| Page Count: | 150 | Hero Designer: | Yes (SKU: 736) |
| Common Abbreviations: | TC | Print Status: | In Print |

The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

Teen Champions is a sub-genre book for the Champions line that covers role-playing Teen Super Heroes.

Chapter One - Teen Champions Games. The book opens with a discussion on the genre itself. One of the aspects that this section conveys nicely is that Teen games are usually High Drama without being Very Serious (well, not in the eyes of adults, just about everything is a crisis to a teen though). The first part has in depth coverage of the many aspects of a Teen Champions game. Starting with Age and the lack of freedom those under eighteen experience. An extensive section on Schools (where much of the action is centered around), including a side-bar on playing a run-aways style game instead. Other setting locations that get coverage include the home environment, common hang-outs and places teens can get a job for some extra cash. The last part covers Super Schools in more detail, which are schools prepared to handle Super Teens either openly or not.

Character Creation starts with background elements. In fact the whole first chapter gives a backseat to the Teen Character's actual powers and goes more into the social issues of having them and being a Teen, which really brings the Teen part to the forefront of Teen Champions. First up is your Family, who are they, who do you like amongst them, do they know about your super alter ego? It covers these issues pretty well. Next is your attitude towards school, a short but important section. Then romance, what Teen doesn't go through romantic issues? This section gives you five common romantic tropes to introduce to the game, as well as tips on how other people influence teen thinking in this area. After that other peers are discussed, from other teens to the various adults that a teen regularly encounters. Other teen interests are covered from access to the car (and man was that a big deal), conformity vs individuality and what level of realism to introduce to the game

The third section ended up my favorite: Cliques. Those circles that many teens invariably find themselves in. Especially in movies and television where the drama level is cranked up a few notches - so it's perfect for a Teen Champions game. After a discussion on groups and how they interact the book provides eight Package Deals to firmly cement the clique, from the Geek to the Jock and everyone else. Section four is short and covers Super Powers, how you got them and how they affect you. This simply reinforces the idea that Super Powers are not the main focus of a Teen Game, merely a catalyst for expanded Teen Drama. The last part of the chapter is Game Elements and covers mostly the mechanics behind creating a Teen Super in the Hero System. While most of it is pretty unexciting the section on Teen Specific Disadvantages is a wealth of ideas.

How does the chapter stack up to introducing someone to the Teen Super genre? Pretty well, it was nice to see the focus on the idea of playing a Teenager than it was to playing a Superhero who just happens to be a teen. The chapter is chock full of useful sidebars and insets with ideas on how to play up being a teenager as well.

Chapter Two - The Ravenswood Academy. This chapter provides a complete school you can use in a Teen Champions game. While the setting puts the school in the Champions Universe Millennium City it could be adjusted to work in any campaign. The school is of the 'hidden teen supers' variety, with boarding facilities. This allows for students who are always on campus (easy to get the PCs together) or day students to get the PCs home life involved. There's a full history of how the school came to be, a map of the grounds (and the hidden super facility) and information on prominent members of the faculty. It also gives information on both powered and unpowered students. Most of the student section covers how the Super Teens are organized and work within the school, which is the focus of the campaign to it's good to have the info. There's a list of classes available, a schedule for the school year and even a section on alumni from the school (many of whom guest lecture at the school). A short section gives some details on Powered NPCs for each year in case a GM needs a few. The final part of the chapter gives full character writes up the Senior Super Teens at the school (in the Champions Universe this is the 2005 class).

Providing a full school write-up demonstrates how to put a lot of the elements from chapter to practice. Not everyone on campus is detailed so GMs have a lot of space to work with if they decide to use the school in their campaign. It's a good, detailed, setting.

Chapter Three - Game mastering Teen Champions. Chapter three is divided into three parts, the GM'S Vault, Teen Heroes and Villains. The first part is short and provides plot seeds for Teen Champions games, Plot Seeds for the NPCs from Chapter Two and Secret's of Ravenswood. The general Plot Seeds include a few scenarios for adult Supers as well that involve some connection to being a Teen. There is also a sidebar on how to handle summer vacation and another on how ending a Teen Champions campaign.

The Teen Heroes section provides two teams. Motor City Defenders, from an inner city public school and Nova, a group of teen runaways. Combined with the team described in Chapter Two the book gives a good cross section of teen superheroes from varying backgrounds. Villains delivers two villain teams and four solo villains. The first team is Generation VIPER, because it's impossible to get away from these guys in the Champions Universe. G-V is a pretty interesting balance of Teen Villains over all and would provide a good set of antagonists for a Teen Champions game. The second villain team is a group of six year olds being raised by an AI, a pretty bizarre team that works oddly well. The moral dilemma of course is how could anyone beat up three six year old kids - even if they are in advanced battle suits. The four solo villains are an interesting mix of moral issues to throw at the PCs from the insane Glorianna, the amoral Janus, a Teen Hero on the verge of growing up and a very manipulated Teen Super Idol who isn't really a villain so much as a plot device.

The Downside:

Missing elements from Chapter One I felt should have been included are dealing with Boarding Schools and more information on Jobs. While not very common in the United States boarding schools still exist and provide a plethora of unique situations that most schools don't encounter. Also, Places Of Employment is pretty limited, it doesn't cover retail jobs at all, or pretty much anything outside food services. While a fast food job is the most common, it certainly isn't the only available option. The only quibble I have on the school write-up is that it doesn't provide any information on how one could adopt it to their own campaigns, but the work involved would be minimal so it is just a quibble.

No Bibliography. From the myriad of teen-movies from the eighties to comics like Teen Titans one would have hoped that resources to get an idea of how to play a Teenager would be provided. No luck though.

The Otherside:

Like most Hero books the information on the subject is covered without actually going into Hero Rules much, meaning it's useful to anyone. If you need information on or help setting up a Teen Supers game this book, especially Chapter One, is a good resource.

The book is a good introduction and set of guidelines to running a Teen Supers game. By putting the emphasis on the personalities and surroundings of the Teens it gives the sub-genre a distinctly different flavor from normal Supers games, one that focuses on being a Teenager, and saving the world before curfew, can't forget that part. If you're interested in running a Teen Supers game this is definitely a source book you want to pick up.

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Last update: **2007/10/02 20:36**

