

Masterminds And Madmen

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

Masterminds And Madmen is an enemies source book for Pulp Hero. It provides five master villains, four organizations and dozens of other villains to pit against your two-fisted heros.

Chapter One - Masterminds. First master villain, Dr. Fang Shen, a Chinese Nationalist who is out to destroy western civilization. His organization is flung far and wide and into everything, with the help of his twin daughters and legions of enforcers he makes the perfect villain for a Pulp Hero set in the Orient, or with a Martial Arts focus. His two daughters capture the aspects of the classic Asian Femme Fatale nicely. The next mastermind is The Skymaster, after all what's a pulp game without airplanes! If your pulp game focuses on aviation Skymaster makes an excellent campaign arch villain, he's also useful anytime you need a mastermind in the air for your evil plans. The Crimson Wraith is next, not nearly as epic as the other master villains, he's a good low level "The Shadow" style villain for pulp campaigns that aren't quite as far reaching as others. Geiskapitan is a master villain based at sea, using a stolen U-Boat to create havoc amongst former allied shipping lanes. If your focus is the oceans, or you simply need a villain to plague the heros as they get from one continent to another Geiskapitan is a good villain, with a bit of a twist to the mysterious. The Iron Claw is similar to the Crimson Wraith, only large in scope, more deadly and perfect for Pulp Games set in a single city rather than as globe trotting adventures. He would have an excellent long time adversary to PCs looking to clean up their city.

The master villains are diverse, interesting, and can be used as the focus of entire campaigns or simply as major menaces in story arcs.

Chapter Two - Fiendish Organizations. Four groups are presented for use against the PCs. First, The Cabal, which is an organization of men and women bent on making as much money as possible and nothing else. While a good pulp enemy they aren't as strait forward as most villains, they would make a good backing group for any number of other organizations. Of all the enemies presented, this group has the most potential to be taken completely out of the Pulp Genre - they would make the perfect Board Of Directors to pit against PCs in a Cyberpunk game. The Coletti Mob, your classic Italian Mob, who doesn't need mobsters in their Pulp games? The Cult Of The Nine Degrees, for Pulp games feature of a bit of Mystic and Occult happenings this group makes a good mid-tier enemy. Large enough to pose a serious threat, small enough to be dismantled by some hard work and a good fist fight or three. The Cult is part demon worshipping cultists and part criminal organization. Most of their desire is the accumulation of material wealth more than the domination of mankind. The last group, The Frankenstein Mob, is good if your Pulp game involves some of the weird, if not out right

supernatural. They're a low-level group of thugs who are mostly trying to get by in a world that rejects them as freaks.

Again, the organizations section provides a wide variety of foes for several kinds of games, or different types of longer story arcs. The Coletti Mob and The Cabal have the most potential to be used in other genre's or to become mastermind level threats should their operations expand.

Chapter Three - Solo Villains. Thirty four adversaries to pit against the PCs. Ranging from common thieves to madmen trying to take over the world. Here's a brief description of each one. Gilbert Allen, a man out to make money through land deals in the open west. El Azor, a self styled Robin Hood in Argentina. Achmed Ben-Ali, fencing anything you've got from out of Egypt. Cimba Janakadi, the spirit of the African Jungle (and naturally she's blonde haired and blue eyed). La Colombe Noir, an expert sneak thief. Il Corridore Notte, fastest driver in Europe, he'll smuggle the goods you've got across any border. Eppie Curran, the Ghoul Queen, good for Pulp games with a mystical twist. Etienne and Vincent D'Arques, two men with one soul between them, another good mystical Pulp opponent. El Diablo Robotico, what's a Pulp game without mad sentient robots? Der Dunkelladler, if the Skymaster is too far reaching he's a good substitute. Sir Jonathan Earle, classic great white hunter with no morals. The Electrocuter, good for a Weird Science Pulp game. Fafnir, another sneak thief. Flambeaux, beautiful as she is deadly, good for weird science Pulp. Colonel Bruce Forsythe, a good classic Pulp villain, nothing nice about him at all. Alejandro Fuentes, guide to Central and South America, for a price of course. Darren "Gats" Gruner, a hit man with deadly aim. Ikeda Hideo, spy and assassin for the Japanese Emperor. Doctor Valentine Keene, pilfering artifacts from adventurers world wide. Maximilliam Kreiger, what's a Pulp game without a giant Nazi to beat you up a couple times. Li-Ming Jade, Pirate Queen of the South Seas. Caroline Nefertari Madison, reincarnation of an ancient Egyptian priestess, good for Pulp games with a mystical twist. Anezka Mrazovic, Decendant of Elizabeth Bathroy, and all that implies. Viktor Petrov, a classic werewolf. Professor Prospero, a magician thief, good for clue hunting Pulp adventures. The Red Sickle, the rising Communist power has agents even in America. The Scorpion, classic Pulp crime lord, a criminal with a theme. Jimmy Seldon, what's Pulp without it's hardboiled detectives? Peter Sinclair, upper crust snob, sure to infuriate the PCs. The Skywayman, some more weird science, this time a jetpack. The Terrormonger, another classic Pulp standby, the costumed mastermind, whose completely insane. Drisani Varmandali, heiress to a vast criminal empire, should something happen to her father. The Volcano Master, more weird science, because you can't have enough mad scientists. The Yellow Scar, out to destroy all of China's enemies, good for Martial Arts in a Pulp game.

As you can see there's a good wide variety of characters in this collection, from the mundane to the fantastic and on up to the just plain weird. All of them are well written, many with interesting twists. And of course, every character comes with three plot seeds in case you don't have any nefarious ideas of your own to introduce them to your game. And the most fun comes when you start to combine and twist plot seeds together, the PCs won't know which way to turn next.

The Downside:

Several blank pages at the end and no Summary Table of NPC stats. I've noticed HERO stopped putting the summary tables in their last few Enemies Books. Which is too bad, they're extremely useful to quickly find important NPC stats.

Of course, those are the only bad things I can really say about this supplement.

The Otherside:

Unless you're into converting to your system of choice the stat blocks aren't much help to you. But the character backgrounds are more than worth the price of the book.

This is a collection of classic and interesting Pulp villains, adversaries and characters. All of the backgrounds are well thought out, there isn't much repetition or overlap in archetypes. From street thug to world conquering master villain it's in here. An excellent addition to any Pulp game.

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