

KESTREL CHAMPIONS CAMPAIGN INTRODUCTION

This packet is an introductory outline of the Champions campaign universe run by Christopher Taylor. This universe is known as the Kestrel universe. The term "Potent" is used frequently in this introduction, and is the press and government's term for 'super', 'paranormal', or 'supernormal'- in other words, the good and bad guys of the campaign.

HISTORY

Potents have been around for as long as normal folk, but were quite rare until recently. Such legends as Hercules, Merlin, and even the deities of the various myths are all postulated to have been potents. In the past, potents tended to either hide their powers (out of fear of them or their being discovered) or attribute these abilities to an external force, such as the gods or witchcraft.

In the last hundred years, potents have become more common, and have started to use their abilities as independent, public forces. Several adventurers were active at the turn of the century, displaying minor abilities (Tarzan, Sherlock Holmes, and others). Then, after the Depression, some familiar names appeared: Batman, The Shadow, The Crimson Avenger, and Doc Savage. Since that time only Tarzan and Doc Savage are rumored to have survived.

By World War Two, a few potents took part in the conflict, including Captain America, Kingdom's Lion, and Spirit Guard. The Axis had it's potents, too, with Kriegsmaschine, Reichskrieger, the Teutonic Knight, and Tetsuoni (who, though believed unkillable has not been seen since the bombing of Nagasaki). Of these, all but Spirit Guard and Captain America were killed or MIA in the war.

In the sixties, many potents surfaced, especially in the USA. The most prominent was American Eagle, an outspoken supporter of the Vietnam conflict and who is still active today, in the NATO group. Several hippie-type heroes died or lost their powers during those years, including Voodoo Chile, Mellow Yellow, and Peace Child. One of the heroes of that era still lives in Khatmandu, Woodstock.

Some special note should be made here of the superhero Dynamo. Dynamo is the first real independent 'Superhero' to be active in America. Not tied to any real organization, and possessing considerable power, Dynamo is responsible for much of the style and image of modern superheroes. First active in 1961, Dynamo was a very law abiding, straight-laced hero. Finally, in 1969, Dynamo vanished. His identity was revealed to be Paul Kramer by Colossus, a now-defunct military-business organization. Paul was later killed by a burglar in his sleep. But in 1972, Dynamo resurfaced. This time around, he was a crafty and brutal force, totally unrestrained by laws and rights. Although Dynamo has made a great number of enemies, he was very effective in fighting crime, especially the drug trade. He was active until 1979, bringing down corrupt politicians, Organized crime syndicates, and others usually untouchable by the law. In May of 1979, he was killed on national television resisting arrest while attempting to kidnap a Senator. It was later revealed that the Senator, Cary Smithe from Kentucky, was heavily involved in arms trade with nations sanctioned by the US, among other schemes.

The seventies, especially the late seventies mark the beginning of the Potent Explosion. Most presently active heroes and villains (and those in between) surfaced in the late seventies. Armor Attack, the Elementals, Cancer, Genocide, Blackguard, and the Society all were established in the seventies. Public support for superheroes began to shift from disdain for the defenders of the establishment to support for the defenders of the little guy (namely, me). The government formed the Potent Activities Agency in 1970, an outgrowth of the House Committee on Potent Activities.

Technology from Factor corporation was the primary shaping force of the decade of the eighties. Genocide went from a loose-knit paramilitary organization to the highly organized tech nightmare it is today. Many heroes began freelancing, solo potents out to support and occasionally reinforce the law. The Guardians appeared overnight in Seattle, and many cities added Special Forces teams to their Police Force.

POTENTS

Superpowers were long misunderstood and mysterious to the incredulous scientific community. Most powers are mentally controlled biochemical abilities, especially mutant powers. The recent explosion of potent appearances was best explained by Dr. Josef Marlon, the leading expert on mutants. According to Dr. Marlon, there is a form of radiation that is extremely difficult to measure (called Marlon Rays by the press). This radiation is very prevalent, responsible for much of the 'missing' 99+ percent of the universe needed for the Big Bang-to-collapse oscillating cycle so popular among cosmologists. This radiation has an effect on human genetic structure. Nuclear explosions, such as in weapon testing and stars release a great deal of Marlon Rays, but the atmosphere blocks out stellar radiation. Thus, in space and in the presence of nuclear testing or power plants is an exposure risk. The primary effect of this radiation is to make future generations of mutants probable.

There are three primary types of effects caused by Marlon Rays: Enhancement, Psychic and Mutant.

Enhancement acts to raise normal human capabilities to their peak levels. While not raising abilities to superhuman levels, Enhancement causes extraordinary subjects. Common forms of Enhancement include savant-level mathematics abilities, eidetic memory, steroid level strength and stamina, extreme good looks, and fantastic senses. Most common is simply an overall increase in abilities. One in 100,000 is enhanced, and most enhanced have mutant children.

Psychics (or Psis) are less common than Enhanced. The Psi has actual psychic ability, such as dowsing, telepathy, ESP, and precognition. These psychic powers are rarely as powerful and reliable as Mutant mental abilities, but are real. Psychics almost always have psi children, and occasionally mutants. One in 400,000 is a Psi.

Mutants are the most powerful result of Marlon radiation, and the least common. These are the potents, able to fly, see through walls, and bounce bazooka shells off their biceps. This level of mutation is detectable within a close range, and even can be analyzed. Not all mutations are beneficial, and occasionally some children are born truly as monsters. Almost without exception, mutant parents will have mutant children. Approximately one in 500,000 is a mutant.

TECHNOLOGY

The technological level of the world has vastly increased in the last ten years. Such exotic devices as anti-gravity, blasters, power armor, and force fields are available for the right price. The police in most cities use stun guns and have light, protective body armor. All major businesses are connected to the On Line computer and banking system. The militaries of the major nations now have science fiction weaponry and robotics in their arsenals.

All of this is thanks to the Factor Corporation. This company is the undisputed leader in the high tech field, decades ahead of its dwindling competitors. Factor builds and markets amazing devices that previously were only in books and movies. Most promising young engineers and scientists are recruited by Factor for its worldwide offices and plants.

Technology builds on technology. Using Factor's advances, many other types of companies have created new foods, drugs, synthetics, medicine, and biotech (such as a bacteria that eats petroleum, dies in twenty four hours when out of salt water, and has colonies edible by plankton eaters). The civilized world is at least twenty-five years ahead of where it would be without Factor.

Many enhanced technicians have developed and marketed tech on their own, despite Factor's attempts to hire all competition. Inventors and geniuses of this sort have founded such companies as Antron Chemical Company, Tarot Research and Development, and Quasi-Science Technologies (or QueST).

PEOPLE

The average joe on the street is unaffected by most of these changes. Even though things are more convenient in many ways, they still are essentially the same, and are likely to continue this way. The explosive technological advances are taken mostly in stride, except by those who dislike any kind of change and stockholders of Factor's competitors. The more neat stuff there is, the more stuff that will break when you most need it.

Superheroes are viewed with general favor and even awe by the public. The mighty form of Captain Good Guy cruising the sky is welcomed by the majority, and the catastrophic battles are seen as entertainment, a sort of super wrestling. The extreme threat of supervillains is countered by the extraordinary aid of superheroes. Sure, Mr. Malevolence can kill New Yorkers by the city block, but only if he can get through Righteousman, who heals the sick and saves collapsing bridges.

Battles between potents unleash energies both weird and awesome as Hiroshima. Blocks are flattened, monuments reduced to rubble, canyons carved, and mountains raised. But this is all rebuilt rapidly with the help of Herofund USA. Herofund is a foundation that is paid into by most potent hero groups, independent companies and philanthropists. The Fund was invented by Vettil, a member of Armor Attack. Herofund USA pays to rebuild destroyed areas, reseed land, and pay the hospital bills of heroes and bystanders. The federal government and many states also made Herofund USA a sizable tax writeoff.

Superheroes are usually charismatic, powerful, larger than life, and well built. The raw power, freedom, and neat stuff (like bases and vehicles) that Heroes command is undeniably compelling. Heroes also live in the best of both worlds, able to stomp heads and help little old ladies cross the street. This all makes the superhero very attractive, even sexy. Fans by the millions follow the Guardians or Armor Attack through magazine and TV. Merchandising (which is somewhat difficult to contest, since the exact identity and ownership of a hero is questionable) of toys, comic books and cartoons are very popular if they concern superheroes. Even more than movie or rock stars, popular superheroes attract adoration and groupies that camp outside potent bases and throw themselves on the heroes.

THE GOVERNMENT

The United States government formed a congressional committee to study the activities and impact of Potents in 1963, following the appearance of Dynamo. Their conclusions led President Nixon to form the Potent Activities Agency (or PAA). This agency was charged to monitor and, if necessary, capture potents. Due to the fear of an autonomous, uncontrollable force in America, the PAA was given a great deal of power and budget. However, public opinion restrained the agency from its full potential.

The Potent Activities Agency is a federal law enforcement agency, part of the justice department, and has nationwide offices like the FBI. Martin Grossovner is the director of the PAA, and has been since its inception in 1970. The PAA's job is to monitor potents in the United States to determine loyalty and national security risk. The PAA has information on the NCIC (National Crime Information Center) computer billboard on known potents. Occasionally, promising potents are recruited for government work by the PAA. There are two containment centers for potent criminals in the US, one in the Rockies, and one underwater in the Pacific ocean. The PAA also requests that hero groups temporarily hold criminals on occasion.

The government would have probably captured (or worse) all the potents it could not use if there were a more manageable number. The truth is, there are too many for this to be practical. So the next best thing was done: it regulated them. Potents are required by law to register their name and known powers at age eighteen. Failure to obey this law is punishable by fines and imprisonment, but is ignored by an estimated fifty percent. As of yet the US government is content to ignore this. Hero groups are requested to register as an example, and are also pressured to be deputized by the PAA. This is generally agreed to, but there are always exceptions. Somewhere, some bureaucrat is smart enough to realize that the last thing America needs is to make enemies out of its most powerful citizens.

LEGALITIES

In the United States, the potent vigilante, or superhero, is generally accepted by the law enforcement community, within limits. The solo that goes out and breaks up criminal activities, infiltrates organizations, and defeats potent villains is allowed to work unhindered. If, on the other hand, the superhero is excessively violent, murderous, hinders police activities, interferes with public life or businesses, or just rocks the boat too much, the authorities will become agitated, and will not tolerate it.

In general, law enforcement prefers to leave potents alone primarily because of the danger and difficulty of capturing and punishing one, but also due to public opinion. A large section of the police departments support and aid the work of superheroes.

Superhero groups are strongly encouraged to register with the PAA. Officially sanctioned and registered groups are given special deputization of the Justice Department, and can act with limited freedom, as solo heroes do. A hero group that does not cooperate is not so free. Very powerful groups, such as the Guardians will be left alone, but weaker ones may be harassed and blocked by a whole alphabet of government agencies. If a superhero group is too much of a security risk, too lawless, or too ruthless, they will be set upon by the PAA's PRAU (Potent Retrieval Armored Units).

Most states (including the one you are in) have Mask Protection laws. These state that a costumed adventurer does not have to reveal his identity in the apprehension and trial of a criminal. This is heavily contested by the ACLU, but so far has been in the court systems for 12 years, and no end to the delays are in sight. Additional laws state that a potent's identity can be proven by the display and testing of powers (only functional if the potent has registered), and that a hero is considered an expert witness concerning the crime and use of powers than a normal person. In addition, unique powers such as telepathy and odd senses are acceptable as evidence.

Superheroes often can make an arrest with less proof than a police officer might require, although a deputy organization still must Mirandize the perpetrator and follow general police procedures. Very powerful bad guys often are taken by the PAA and vanish even before a trial is finished.