The Ultimate Speedster

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

The Ultimate Speedster is the Hero System guide to movement powers and characters based around them. While the most common usage of the term "Speedster" is for those super-fast superheroes, the book does a good job explaining just how the idea of unusual movement applies to all genres.

Chapter One - Character Creation. This chapter covers creating speedster characters from the ground up. Speedster Basics covers the foundation of the character, their Background, Personalities and possible Archetypes they fit into, and covers the idea of Super-Speed as a Special Effect in and of itself.

Characteristics offers the first bit of Optional Rules. Dealing with Dexterity almost completely in this section. An optional rule to break DEX down into three separate stats looks very interesting, but may be more granualrity than one would need in a game unless the focus is on movement and combat. For instance Special Forces Hero could do well to adopts the Optional DEX Rules to further differentiate characters who will all most likely put a lot of points into this Characteristic. I see it especially helpful for Heroic Level games to break this stat down a bit to prevent uniformity amongst characters. There are also several alternate ways of calculating Speed, adding the INT and EGO Characteristics into the mix.

The Skills section has a Speedster Martial Arts package, and some useful alternate uses for Movement Skill Levels. The Talents and Perks section doesn't provide anything new, simply suggestions on which might be appropriate for characters that can move faster than normal. The Powers section covers all of the Movement Powers in detail, not only reprinting all the information from the main rules but adding some more as well. Mostly there's more discussion on how various Advantages and Limitations interact with Movement. The rest of the Powers section is short, but there is a very helpful Aid Chart that tells you just how much Aid you need with an Average Roll to raise your DEX and SPD Scores by a given amount. Leaping has a new option to bounce, adding a new dimension to this Power.

The Disadvantages covers a number of Disads that Speedsters, mostly of the super-fast variety, could take. From dependencies for needing to burn off energy and metabolism, to a good bit of Psychological Limitations appropriate to those who have more freedom of movement than the average Character.

Chapter Two - Speedster Powers. Many of these Powers are reprinted from other sources, but it's good to have all the Speedster and Movement related Powers in one sourcebook. And most of them

were tweaked in some way specifically to address Speedster types. In total there are three-hundred and eighteen powers written up as examples in this chapter. They are divided by special effect. Speedster Powers is a generalized catchall effect, and is where most of the Running powers are, as well as the Speed Zone powers. The rest of the effects are Dimensional Travel, Flight, Kinetic Energy, Leaping, Swimming, Swinging, Teleportation, Time, Tunneling, Vibration, and Whirling.

Chapter Three - Speedsters Genre By Genre. This chapter is a collection of NPCs as example characters for the major genres. There are five Champions characters, two are rewrites of existing characters (Cheshire Cat and Kinetic) and three are new for the book (El Salto, Mantara, Vector). The new characters focus on Leaping, Swimming and Flight, respectively. For the Heroic genres there are nine more characters. Dark Champions has Bullethead, who has more Running than most people. Fantasy Hero has two characters, Tovar Farwalker is a travel mage, and comes with eight spells you can adapt to a Fantasy game; And the Winged Folk, not a character but a template you can use for a race of winged beings. Horror Hero provides us with the burrowing horror. Ninja Hero's character is Kagamishoki, a demon that uses mirrors to travel. Pulp hero has two characters, the Midnight Comet is a classic pulp crime fighter, with a bit of a mystic bent. The Mole Marauder is a villain based around Tunneling powers. Star Hero has two characters as well, a template for a Rocket Squadron Blue character, which is for Pulp Science Fiction, and the alien True Travelers.

Chapter Four - The Hero System Movement Companion. This chapter has some of the best gaming information on movement I've seen. It covers all of the rules on movement from the main book, but the extra and optional rules are what make it stand out. A short section on Obstacles covers moving into and around things. Segmented Movement gets expanded to include separating movement from actions. There's a neat table that recosts Movement Powers to use meters instead of Hero Inches. Swinging gets a good long discussion on realistic vs non-realistic treatment, and various ways to handle both in a game. Controlled and Uncontrolled movement also gets expanded. Uncontrolled Movement contains rules for balance, orientation and contact (what's needed to maintain controlled movement); Control Rolls (remaining in control in adverse situations); Losing Control (the causes for loss of control and the effects); Consequences Of Control Loss (what happens next, besides crashing). Terrain Effects And Modifiers covers less than ideal terrain for moving over and through. All of these come with some handy tables with roll modifiers, and movement rate modifiers based on the environment. Movement in Unusual Environments covers how each Movement Power is affected by being underwater, and in heavy or light gravity.

Next is one of the neatest new set of optional rules you can utilize. Racing, providing some rules for competitive movement that are more than "I move, you move." It divides races into three types, non interfering (the most boring in game terms really), competitive and combative (the most likely encountered, including things like car chases). Racing Maneuvers covers some basic movement maneuvers to use in a race to gain or retain an advantage. Designing And Running Races goes over handling lanes and the terrain in a game. With the racing rules taken into effect, combined with the terrain modifiers from earlier and Control Rolls for daring maneuvers you have a recipe for some very interesting scenes involving movement you can play out. A car chase with all these rules in effect becomes more than inches of movement and Combat Driving Rolls, but something that can really involve strategy and the environment of the game.

Other Movement covers rules for mounted movement, with a good bit on combat training for your mount. The Movement Skills section has a number of suggestions on different uses beyond simply reducing the Turn Mode.

Movement Physics gets into a whole discussion on the real physics and how it relates to movement. Covering the medium of travel in and against. The Speed, Velocity and Acceleration section goes over

starting, stopping and continuing movement, with some useful rules for Traction.

Chapter Five - Adventure At Top Speed: Speedster Campaigning. Here we cover a lot of ground regarding having Speedster type characters in a game. The main focus is on the very fact moving speedsters, usually found in the Superheroic Genre. Included are a number of plots that can be used to center around speedsters specifically, a few take into account the interaction between fast moving and slower moving characters.

The Speed Zone, using Extra-Dimensional Movement to simulate moving at speeds even faster than the smallest game increment defined. Faster than light at the highest levels even. While the build and rules themselves are well done, this also takes into consideration a number of balance issues and is an excellent way to achieve certain effects. I will say it is the single most potentially abusive things I have ever seen. Use this with caution. On the other hand, it's pretty cool, and shows just how far you can stretch the system to obtain some very esoteric concepts. You could center a story arc or mini-campaign around the interaction of the Speed Zone and the Real World. I would suggest this is a good plot point instead of a Power suitable to Characters.

Speedster Combat covers a number of aspects of combat at high velocity. Going over maneuvers, introducing a few new maneuvers that a good for any game, not just speedsters (specifically the rules for Interposing, which is excellent). There is also a section on changing how the Speed Characteristic works, providing some very good suggestions on changing it for either more randomness or simply shaking up the order of things. For those who don't like, or want to try something different from, the Speed Chart this section is good. There is also an expanded Range Modifier table going out about as far as anyone really needs to (if you're firing more than 2 quadrillion kilometers I suggest taking a Phase to close distance first).

The last part of the book is thirty-two Speedster Gadgets. Most of this is simply using Gadget as a special effect for a number of Movement Powers. Like other books of this nature that list the Gadgets in the back I feel they should be grouped with the rest of the powers at the end of that chapter - not the end of the book where they look like an after thought. Still, if you're playing a Gadgeteer Archetype this is a good collection of powers to work with.

The Downside:

A little more discussion in the Genre By Genre section on how to fit genre conventions to unusual modes of movement would have been nice.

Like I said, the gadgets at the end of the book looks out of place, but that's not a true downside to the book itself.

The book had a heavy focus on fast moving characters after making a point in the beginning that Speedster as it was used here applied to any character with an unusual movement ability compared to the rest of the game world. While the coverage of the fast moving types is excellent, spending a bit of time on how to set up Speedster types in other games without a focus on pure speed would have rounded the book out some more.

The Otherside:

Some good discussions on setting speedster characters and gaming with speedsters can be invaluable advice to any GM working with the archetype in a game. Beyond that the book is mostly rules for dealing with Movement in the Hero System. I would say maybe a quarter of the book is truly useful to non-Hero gamers. Unless you need ideas for abilities, then all of Chapter Two has potential.

Of all the Archetypes Speedsters can be the hardest to work with. Their usually high number of actions and speed can break many games. The book does an excellent job of giving advice on working with, gaming with and generally setting up Speedster situations. Anyone playing a speedster or any GM with a speedster in their game would do themselves some good to pick this up. Also, anyone whose game focuses on movement would also benefit, if for no other reason to spice things up with some interesting interactions. A Car Wars style game could take strong advantage of Chapter Four for instance.

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