

UNTIL: Defenders Of Freedom

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

UNTIL: Defenders Of Freedom is an organization book for Champions, detailing the United Nations Tribunal on International Law, the U.N.'s Superhuman response branch. It's important to keep in mind that the U.N. in the Champions Universe is not the U.N. of the real world. If all else fails, UNTIL provides a good look into how to create and run an organization dedicated to fighting Supervillains.

Chapter One - The Origin Of UNTIL. Chapter one is a brief history of the United Nations itself in the Champions Universe, mostly it adds references to Superhumans in what is otherwise a recap of the formation of the real world's United Nations. It goes mostly into the history behind the idea of UNTIL, how it came to be, and major events through the decades since it was formed in nineteen-sixty three. From idea to full fledged police force helping the world this chapter is a brief but useful look into the history of UNTIL.

Chapter Two - The United Nations. There are two sections in this chapter. First is the United Nations, which has some information on structure and organization. It focuses on aspects that Players are likely to interact with or that directly relate to UNTIL. It is not a comprehensive look at the U.N. in total. It does contain a list of all U.N. Members as of 2003. Part two pertains to International Law. With notes on sovereignty, extradition, diplomatic immunity, international police powers, law of the high seas and the law of war and similar items. Mostly these are also things that the Players are likely to encounter when dealing with UNTIL, playing a campaign as UNTIL agents or simply trying to pursue supervillains into foreign territories.

Chapters one and two are general looks at the United Nations and UNTIL, how the world sees them and how they interact with the world.

Chapter Three - UNTIL Structure And Organization. Starting with the High Command, this chapter covers all the various sections and levels of UNTIL. Who reports to who, how it's organized, rank structure (which is quasi military) and internal politics. It does provide the names and country of origin for many members of UNTIL's upper ranks, it does not give hard numbers for how many people are in a given region. This allows the GM to tailor the organization to his campaign more easily. It also goes into how UNTIL divides the world into seven regions, how they generally operate in the Champions Universe and a few important details. The organization is straight forward, easy to use and easy to adapt to a campaign.

Chapter Four - Agents Of UNTIL. Requirements to join UNTIL, basic and advanced training, discipline,

uniforms, and medals cover the first part of the chapter. Package Deals go into the various types of agents from basic to various specializations, all with a Hero System Package Deal and information on the agents role within the organization. Special Projects covers the myriad of sub-sections that are set up to monitor specific threats throughout the world that agents can become a part of. Agent Types And Motivations covers some ideas on backgrounds and a look into the kinds of people that join UNTIL. Ten broad personalities are identified that range from wanting to help to using UNTIL as a means to another goal. Character Creation covers some of the Skills and Perks specific to UNTIL Agents that are appropriate to Players.

This chapter is useful for setting up a detailed agent to either interact with the PCs, or actually be PCs in an UNTIL centered game. If a GM needs to flesh out a few NPCs that he has regularly interact with the PCs this is the chapter to turn to.

Chapter Five - UNTIL Technology. Weapons - generally the staple equipment of most games in some manner or another. UNTIL has a whole range of weapons to equip their agents with when dealing with superhuman threats. Thirty two weapons, and variations adapted in the field by agents with the know-how, are presented here. From blaster pistols to man-portable torpedoes. Most of UNTIL arsenal is non-lethal, at least to superhumans, as fits your average comic book genre. Armor And Uniforms goes over both the standard uniform an UNTIL agent wears into battle, and seven more specialized clothing that agents use for specific missions. Miscellaneous Equipment covers communications gear and tool kits used by agents.

Computers goes into the computing power behind UNTIL. There are three levels to UNTIL's computers. First is HUGIN, the AI behind the organizations linked computer network, and helps high command with tactical decisions. MUNIN is actually a series of computers broken down into three types. MUNIN are the computers installed in bases and vehicles. Large facilities have a Mark One, smaller bases a Mark Two, and vehicles a Mark Three advanced computer. These are not AIs, but simply very powerful super computers all linked together to form a formidable information network. Below that are the various issued personal and field computers agents use on missions. It's this network of supercomputers that gives UNTIL it's ability to response quickly and appropriately to situations.

Vehicles covers all the vehicles UNTIL uses to get around. Including motorcycles, troop transports, grav-tanks, jet-cycles, helicopters, planes, and watercraft. Fourteen modern and advanced military-esque vehicles are written up. UNTIL Facilities covers major UNTIL facilities. World Headquarters and Guardhouse (UNTIL's jail) are given short descriptions. Gateway is UNTIL's space station and it gets a fair amount of space for description, as well as write-ups for the two advanced shuttles UNTIL uses to get back and forth. Nautilus is UNTIL's undersea base and Aegir is UNTIL's super advanced submarine. The only thing this does cover is what a typical UNTIL office might look like around the world, or at the very least how it might be equipped.

Chapter Six - Tactics And Procedures. Agents In Combat is mostly advice for running UNTIL agents as a GM (be they NPC or PC Agents). Making them effective, but not overwhelmingly so, how to minimize the book keeping of large numbers of agents on a battle map, and a short section on how a typical squad works together. This is actually good advice for running any set of agents involving numbers. UNTIL And Superhumans covers the relationship UNTIL has with the good guys in general, and how they work with them to accomplish mutual goals. UNITY is UNTIL's superhero team, after all if they have to battle supervillains it makes sense to have some agents at that level to work directly for them. There are six superheroes written-up here, and even if you don't use UNTIL they're good for another Superteam in your game at the very least. The Future Soldier Program covers the failed attempt UNTIL had at creating Super-agents, and the one success they did have before the program shut down, he's a low level Superhuman and is a good example of what to build from should you want

to run a Super-Agent Campaign with UNTIL.

Chapter Seven - Game mastering UNTIL. UNTIL Campaigns covers running UNTIL in Champions and other Genres. For running it in Champions, the default genre setting, it provides a number of uses. Making UNTIL an ally or patron, UNTIL as an enemy (or similar adversarial attitude) to the PCs, PCs as UNTIL Agents themselves (regular, super-agent, or superhuman), or even as a neutral force that takes on aspects of ally and enemy. There are several other ways of using UNTIL as a central focus for a game presented. It finishes by going into ways you can adapt UNTIL to other genres, Commando Hero, Cyber Hero, Dark Champions, Fantasy Hero, Horror Hero, Ninja Hero, Pulp Hero, and Star Hero are covered. The GM's Vault reveals the truths behind the information and rumors presented in the first part of the book, or at least most of them. It also includes Plot Seeds for the major NPCs from the beginning of the book.

Appendices provides some very useful tools. First is a big list of UNTIL Slang and a Glossary Of Terms that can be handed out to Players and used to add a lot of flavor to the game. A Who Is Who of UNTIL is also provided, listing the many NPCs from the main text in one easy reference including country of origin and current assignment.

For GM's the very last part of the book is a collection of Typical UNTIL Agent character sheets for use when you need a squad of men. These Agent Templates apply the Package Deals from Chapter Four to create one of each of the Standard and Advanced Agents.

The Downside:

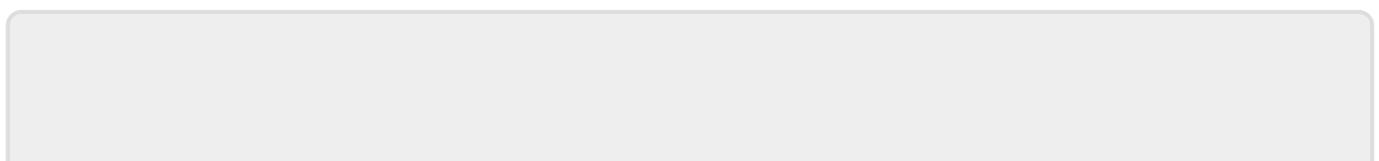
There are a few things missing that I would have liked to see. First is information on a typical UNTIL facility, number of agents, equipment, response times, etc. And there are no maps, a map of the major facilities that would likely get actual play time would have been extremely useful. Particularly a map of Guardhouse and Gateway as they are excellent locations for an UNTIL scenario.

While there is some information on Internal Politics, there isn't a lot of specific detail that brings UNTIL to life as an organization. The book is a very good technical example of how to set up such an organization - but it lacks the small details that could really bring UNTIL life itself as a group. Some more on specific people around the world who work for UNTIL, their personal agendas and how those intersect UNTIL could have really given this book life - not to mention help a GM set the wheels in motion behind the scenes for PCs to encounter.

The Otherside:

Overall, the book is an excellent guide to creating, organizing and running UNTIL, or any similar world spanning organization. Even if you don't use the U.N. or UNTIL as is the book is easily adapted whole clothe to your own Government Agency, especially if it's multinational. If it's not multinational just file off the Country Of Origin and replace it with Region Of Origin (works especially well in the U.S. where people can take just as much pride in their State as some people do in their Country).

This is a fairly complete Organization book, including a myriad of ways to adapt it to individual games. Useful to just about anyone needing such a thing (Hero gamer or not).



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