

Dark Champions: The Animated Series

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

Dark Champions: The Animated Series is a sourcebook to give player and campaign information to run one of two types of games. First is a non-violent, almost classic T.V. Vigilante (think Adam West Batman series) type game. The Second is a low-powered superhero game. It's divided into three chapters for reference.

Chapter One: The Animated Series Genre. This chapter looks at "The Animated Series" as a whole. The various genre tropes that should be looked at, some specific things you want to avoid to keep in genre, and generally all the stuff you need to run a more lighthearted and fun Dark Champions/Vigilante game. Unfortunately it's also a very short chapter without a lot of detail and very few examples and specific references. If you're not familiar with the genre beyond a passing glance the chapter doesn't really help you that much.

Chapter Two: Hudson City Knights. This chapter takes a look at the classic "Animated Series" type campaign. Themed villains, wacky capers and good old fashioned POW! BAM! type fun. Well, the first two pages do that at least. The next forty-eight pages are nothing but character writeups. And while character writeups can help you get an idea of what a hero or villain in this genre look like, they aren't always the best source on how to get the feel of the genre down from a This Is How To Run A Game point of view.

Chapter Three: Hudson City Powers. This chapter goes over running a low leveled super-hero style game. This is the closest to the classic fourth edition Dark Champions that the current system has gotten. Again, two pages describe the genre itself as Supers with a single schtick, or a very low level of ability, fighting street crime - not world busting crime as described in the Champions setting. After that we get forty pages of character writeups (both good guys and bad guys).

But the book isn't without it's strong points. I don't know any GM who doesn't occasionally need or mind the help of a decently written and creative adversary for their Players. And Dark Champions: The Animated Series comes with thirty such villains. Sixteen in Chapter 2 and fourteen in Chapter 3. If you're familiar with the genre and need some bad guys to flesh out your world this book has a good creative selection of them to choose from.

The Downside:

This is, unfortunately, not a very good introduction to the "Animated Series" style genre. If you're

familiar with the style - non-violent vigilante or low-level super-heroes - it's a good book for some brief information to get the feel.

Also there is no bibliography. There are a few brief mentions in the sparse text regarding some of the source material. But there's no good list of stuff that illustrates what this genre is about.

It makes several references to the Dark Champions sourcebook, which is appropriate as there's no need to reprint a lot of information. But the notes on making those references "Animated Series" specific are sparse at best. The book could do with some concrete examples to showcase why this genre is different from a normal Dark Champions genre game.

All this brings us to - what would have made this book a better resource on running these two similar genres? I would have reduced the number of character writeups and written a short adventure for each genre. Pre-written adventures by someone who knows the genre (such as the Author of a genre book) are an excellent way to Show The Genre (instead of just Telling The Genre) to prospective GMs and Players alike. A quick run through scenario would have done wonders to help this book out.

The Otherside:

Unfortunately, this book doesn't offer very much for non-Hero players. With twenty pages of non-system specific information it lacks juicy genre information.

If you're already familiar with "Animated Series" type games as a genre, this is a good sourcebook for both NPCs and some general advice on running such games. If you're not very familiar, or not familiar at all, with the genre the book isn't as much of a help as I would have liked.

So what is an "Animated Series" genre game like? Is it just a vigilante game without the blood, cursing and a sparse application of gritty realism? Or is there something more to capturing the feel of the genre? The book doesn't do as good a job of answering that question as I would have liked. Especially since I'm not completely familiar with the genre myself.

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