Post-Apocalyptic Hero

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Contributions in Chapter Four: Darren Watts (Zombie World, Revelations 1001); Jason Walters (Destinations); James Jandebeur (Mechanon Truimphant)

The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

Post-Apocalyptic Hero is a genre guidebook to gaming after it all ends.

Chapter One - The Post-Apocalyptic Genre. The book starts with just exactly what the Post-Apocalyptic genre is and could contain. Going into elements that help define the aspects of the genre that set it apart from other gaming genres, aspects beside the world ending that is. This includes things like The Ancients (pre-Apocalypse society), Power, Ruins, Mutants and common themes for stories using the genre. The second section covers the five main Sub-Genres, Low Post-Apocalypse, High Post-Apocalypse, Road Wars, Sleepers Awaken, and Zombie Apocalypse. The first two are the most open of the sub-genres. The two main factors being realism for Low and weird stuff for High. Roads Wars is basically running a Mad Max style campaign. Sleepers Awaken could be made part of just about any other sub-genre as well as a sub-genre of its own, this involves people from before the apocalypse getting involved in the world afterwards (whether they were cryogenically frozen or in a self contained shelter of some kind for possibly even generations (such as the video game Fallout). Zombie Apocalypse covers the Zombie Genre nicely. Then mixing genres and elements is covered, going over aspects such as Comedy, Horror (a good mix for Post-Apocalypse games), Mystery, Romance, and Tragedy (another good mix). Lastly the chapter covers mixing Post-Apocalypse with other major genres; Star Hero, Champions, Dark Champions, Fantasy Hero, and Western Hero.

Chapter one, like all of Hero's genre books, provides excellent information on aspects and elements of the genre. The chapter itself includes a lot of quotes and bits from source material to drive home the flavor of the genre. If you ever had some ideas for a Post-Apocalypse game this chapter is a good source of things to include and avoid to bring out different flavors of the genre.

Chapter Two - Post-Apocalyptic Character Creation. This is mostly, but not completely, Hero rules for creating a Post-Apocalypse character. Starting with eleven Archetypes, presented as Package Deals in Hero System rules, that are common to the genre (and sub-genres) and how they interact with other archetypes as well as some advice on playing them. There are also three Cultural Package Deals which focus more on outlook that character archetype.

Skills are covered next, again while the rules aspect is Hero-centric the advice on each Skill can be

used universally. Most of the skills discuss how they change in a Post-Apocalyptic campaign, or are unusable. Two get more and expanded information. First is changing the Concealment Skill to a Scavenging Skill, complete with a table to provide modifiers to the Skill Roll based on the size of area being scavenged, it's condition, and how thorough the character is being. The second expanded skill is Survival. Three new sub-categories of the survival skill are presented as examples, Wastelands, Rad Zones and Ruins. In a broader sense of the skill it has very detailed information, with tables, on using the skill to survive a Post-Apocalyptic world; Fire Starting, Finding Water, Finding or Building Shelter and the like. With some guidelines on using the skill for multiple people in case not everyone has it.

Other elements of the Hero System are briefly covered. Perks covers changing the Money Perk into a Supplies Perk instead. The Vehicles Perk has some good information on just how far a typical vehicle of a given weight can go on a gallon of gas, which can be extremely important in a world where gas-stations no longer exist. Powers expands the Life Support: High Radiation Power for more granularity since Radiation and it's effects can be more prominent in, or even important features of a, Post-Apocalyptic Game.

Equipment gets a good bit of discussion too. Covering salvaging, repairing and creating equipment in a world where technology has fallen. There is some advice on using what are mundane items today as weapons and armor after is all ends. Such as the parking meter mace and the sign post sword. Also included are some science-fiction weapons for Post-Apocalypse games that take place after mankind has advanced to a more, by twentieth century standards, advanced state. There are also some equipment write-ups for gear that isn't armor or weapons (which have tables like all Hero System Equipment sections. They include Medical Gear, Sensory and Communications Gear, Survival and Protective Gear and Miscellaneous Gear. Some of them have a note stating they're from a Science-Fiction setting and only intended for Post-Apocalypse games after a Sci-Fi setting collapses. Most of the gear is intended as rare salvage rather than commonplace items.

Chapter Three - Gamemastering Post-Apocalyptic Style. After figuring out what kind of genre and characters you want to play someone has to set up the game itself. This chapter is intended as a guide to GMs of a Post-Apocalypse game in creating the proper feel and keeping it. First is Bringing Down The Destruction, in order to run a game After you have to know how it all ended to begin with. Sixteen inventive ways of ending the world are provided from the stand-by Nuclear War to Alien Invasions and Global Cooling or Warming. Some more inventive methods include massive solar flares, or atmospheric pollution reaching a tipping point and creating global ecological disaster. Once you've ended it then you have to decide just long after that ending you want your game to take place in. From starting the game during the End Days themselves to making it a distant event that is spoken of only in legend. Things Fall Apart provides some time lines for modern structures to decay back to dust, with a note that they are good guesses but it's impossible to know for sure just how long some things might take to decay. Technology Level discusses implementing various levels of technology from none to close to modern, and ways of creating pockets of high and low technology or having select items remain (like cars in a Road Wars style game).

Character Guidelines covers setting a power level for the game, comparing the PCs to the world. There is also some generally good advice on Power Level versus Effectiveness Ceiling. In Hero Terms this is a discussion on Active Point Ceilings vs other measuring sticks (Combat Values, Damage Classes, etc) and the pros and cons of either method. The Arms Race (where PCs try and get bigger or more weapons than everyone else) is given some space as well since it can be a very important factor in a game where acquiring more weapons may be a story arc in and of itself. Campaign Tone covers some advice on morality of the game, realism, outlook, and the importance of the PCs to the overall scheme of the world at large. Campaign Themes (civilization and a virtue, cost of survival,

technologies perils) and Campaign Types (using the sub-genres from Chapter One) round out the set-up of the game.

Running The Campaign is next. This is a discussion of setting up and running plots mostly. With four classic Post-Apocalypse Plots provided as examples and how to use these four major themes either as stand alone or as varying themes in a long campaign.

Environmental Threats covers the parts of the setting itself that cause a hazard to the players. In a Post-Apocalypse setting the land itself is an enemy sometimes. Radiation is up first, mostly covering realistic effects of exposure to radiation and how to protect yourself from it. One helpful part is converting radiation to damage classes based of RADs. Other 'Zones covers chemical zones, and biological zones created from weapons of those types, though the discussion isn't nearly as exhaustive given the many types of chemical and bioagents available. Ruins are covered as an environment themselves. With some guidelines for conditions of the ruins and dangers that they contain, with some tables based on how long after the event you are for the conditions. Starvation isn't so much an environment as a constant threat, the useful part here is some rules for how long it takes someone to starve to death even with small amounts of food available. Scavenging covers find and trying to use salvaged items from the Pre-Apocalypse days, with modifiers using the conditions of the ruins and time frame of the setting.

Villains And NPCs is the last part of the chapter. This section covers setting up and playing the major enemies of the PCs, and possibly of the re-emerging society. As well as some overall advice on creating more neutral or friendly NPCs.

Chapter Four - A Post-Apocalyptic Hero Sourcebook. The eight settings provided in this chapter are good examples of putting all the advice from the first three chapters to use.

Welcome to the Apocalypse, Bring Marshmallows.

Amrica is a Low Post-Apocalyptic setting. Focusing mostly on realism, it takes place centuries after a nuclear war destroyed not only cities by the land itself, unleashing natural disasters that reshaped the land. It does contain some bits of cinematic elements, such as a Road Wars feel to part of the land. As presented it's fairly wide open, by moving the time line closer to the nuclear war you can have a full fledged Road Wars campaign, or it can be completely changed to include any other elements you want. With it is a short adventure plot using a Horror Theme to it, and a sample character for a Low setting.

After The Blast, by contrast, is a High Post-Apocalypse setting taking place a thousand years after a nuclear war. Complete with mutants of all sorts and some higher levels of technology. The Pre-Apocalypse world in this scenario was slightly higher in tech level than current early twenty-first century tech is. This section provides write-ups for both positive and negative mutations, a very short Mutant Bestiary and three sample characters.

The Moon Shattered Earth is a Post-Apocalypse brought about by an external force rather than internal. A giant meteor barely missed the earth, but caused the moon to close it's orbit and the land itself to violently remake itself. On top of all that magic returned to the land, making this a variant on High Post-Apocalypse, and a fitting tribute to the old Thundaar The Barbarian cartoons. Complete with mutants, pieces of Pre-Apocalypse technology of all sorts working in some areas, wizardry and other similar elements. This comes with a sample village built around the ruins of an airport terminal, two sample characters, and a magic system. The magic system utilizes the magic from the Fantasy Hero Turakian Age setting but alters the mechanics enough to be it's own - as such if you own the Fantasy Hero Grimoires you have all the spells needed for this setting.

Zombie World provides two things. First are guidelines for a Zombie Apocalypse, completely with a scientific aspect that you can exploit should you want to run a game that actually ends the Zombie Threat. Second are a lot of suggestions on how to set up different kinds of Zombie Apocalypse games from types of zombies to mixing it with some other sub-genres.

Revelations 1001 is a biblical apocalypse (though not an exact recounting of Revelations since that leaves little room for gaming). Complete with the Four Horsemen and a brief history of Europe circa 1000 A.D..

Destinations is the bleakest of all the Post-Apocalypse settings presented. It doesn't get more hopeless than this one, a massive solar flare stripped all life off the surface of the Earth. This setting is centered around the idea of finding a safe haven, and comes complete with rules for Hope - which is an interesting concept and vital to this type of Post-Apocalypse.

Mechanon Triumphant is a Post-Apocalypse setting for a Champions game. Using the age old comic book trope of Alternate Earth's there is one where Mechanon managed to blow up the world in 1985 when he first appeared. And now he's found a way to your games world.

Tobacco Road is the shortest of the presented settings, it takes a localized setting of part of the South East United States and turns it into a Road Wars campaign after a massive volcano ended civilization. This is one, as it says, serves as an example of how to take a familiar setting (your home area) and turning it into a Post-Apocalypse setting.

With just about every type of Apocalypse, Sub-Genre and Mixed Genre represented this chapter is a wealth of ideas for setting up a Post-Apocalypse game of varying levels and ideas. A valuable resource for any GM.

The Downside:

It needed more maps?

The Otherside:

The book is good for anyone wanted some advice or ideas for setting up and Running a Post-Apocalyptic Game, in whatever system they want. Chapters One and Three are especially useful in helping to create just the right setting.

It's worth every penny and a definite need for anyone who wants to play in or GM a game after it's all been blasted back to dust.