

Guardian Universe II: Power Overwhelming

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Publisher: Dilly Green Bean Games

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Reviewer Bias: This title was given to me for review purposes and eventual play use. I am also associates with Jay Libby.

Guardian Universe II: Power Overwhelming is a comic book superhero style RPG using the newest version of the basic system rules set developed by Dilly Green Bean Games. The book is in full color and it'll cost you \$32.00. GUII is the sequel to Guardian Universe Core Fuzion, but you don't need to be familiar with the original to play.

From the Back Cover

"A power without skill is just another fireworks show."

The reality everyone feared just got jacked up! Guardian Universe II takes players into a world where having powers is almost a crime. If you aren't on the side of justice, you are sure to get a one way ticket to the grave. Rogues like Aegis can crush whole buildings with a snap of his fingers. LEGION, an Evolutionary hunter, mass produces machines to track down and exterminate a new breed of human. The Demi-God, NeCross, has taken aim at Earth. In his path, fellow Demi-Gods, cosmic Guardians, and Avatars of the Gods of Mythology who will do anything to stop him. Then there are the Ones Before.

*Guardian Universe II: Power Overwhelming is a stand-alone RPG. You don't need to own the original Guardian Universe Core Fuzion to play this game.

*Included are rules for Cosmic and Street level games.

*Easy-to-use game mechanics. This book uses a variation of the cult classic TBS. Tired of rules that just kill a fun game? This book brings back 'easy' to RPGs.

*The history of the Guardian Earth and the organizations that fight to protect and destroy it.

*We've got Battlesuits, CHI, Cybernetics, Magic and POWERS!

*Play heroes like: Aliens, Altered Heroes, Demi-Gods, Evolutionary, Machine Hero and Technical Genius!

*Read other issues included within and play more heroes like: Angels, Cursed, Demons, Demi-Humans, and Crime Fighters. Best of all, you can even play Hellbrand!

*All you need to play are: Paper, Pencils, and either 1d10, 2d10, 3d6, or a deck of cards to act as the variable.

Presentation

Being in full color obviously is what raises the price tag, especially for a smaller company like DGBG; however, don't let the price scare you. The artwork is awesome to say the least and it really evokes the comic book feel of the game. It's fresh, it's fun and it certainly puts its color to use. The stylized background image for each page and overall layout of the book also contribute to the comic book feel of the game. This isn't the occasional picture and the page border that you'll be seeing either. You will see pictures on almost every page, sometimes more there's more than one picture. Don't let that fool you though – there is a ton of game material here.

The layout and overall look of the book doesn't seem totally professional like something you would see out of a big name publisher like White Wolf or Wizards of the Coast, but it's still pretty good and it isn't hard to read through the material. The layout does not cause you to lose your place or anything.

The Content

You definitely get a lot of material with GUII. The book is divided into eight chapters, or 'issues.' The first is an in-depth look at how to create a character as well as some options players have further down the road. The chapter also includes a timeline of events leading up to the present in game (2009) as well as the basic game mechanics. Issue two describes the setting of GUII. You may recognize the inspiration for some of the material if you are familiar with superhero comics like X-men or Ghost Rider. The third issue provides game statistics for generic civilian peoples from thugs to cops as well as some of the supervillains and superheroes known to the world. Issues four through seven are like mini-campaigns. They basically change the superhero style of GUII while still remaining a game set in the GUII universe. For example, issue four: Streets of Fire is a way for the GM to adjust GUII into a more street-level vigilante style game akin to Batman or Daredevil. Issue eight is for GMs, containing additional information, alternate and optional game mechanics and all of the charts in the book in one place.

Creating Characters

Guardian Universe II makes creating characters incredibly easy. It's really a feature of the newest version of the basic system rules, but it makes sure that character generation is quick and painless. In a half an hour I had already created a character from scratch. The only thing that slows down character generation is the sheer number of options as far as superpowers go, but that isn't a bad thing. It allows players to create superheroes of their own original design or modeled after their favorite hero like Spiderman or Superman. There are a lot of options available here.

The only problem I had with character generation was that the original printing of the book was lacking a table necessary for character creation. The problem was resolved quickly so anyone planning on buying it or buying it after about two weeks after the books publication (which has long since passed) should have everything they need. If you still are missing the table, it has been posted for free at the Dilly Green Bean Games website. For those who like bookbinding, you can even download the page that the table

was supposed to be on and stick it right in the book. Either way, the issue has been resolved.

The Setting

GUII's back story is really great. It is a mixture of original content and allusions to already formed comic book stories, but with twists. The setting also looks at certain political possibilities should the events in the GUII world occur, which certainly makes it interesting.

The other interesting notion is the line between a benevolent superhero with justice in his eyes versus the government lackey superhero who does what they are told because they make more money that way. The GM can really play with this idea and suddenly superhero NPCs can become rivals against the team of players. It just gives one more reason for the GM to add some complexity to his game's storyline rather than 'Okay, he's evil so you guys have to take him out.' Options like this that are built into the setting really can help a GM add some flavor to his game.

The Mini-campaigns

These are the really interesting portion of Guardian Universe II. These four issues really make it so that you aren't buying one game, but five. These mini-campaigns take the GUII setting and change it to a variant of the genre and with some simple adjustments; GMs could even combine the material from two or more of these issues.

As mentioned before, Streets of Fire adjusts GUII to less of a superhuman style game to more of a streetwise vigilante style of game. Armored ↑ adjusts the game to a more technological style of play, allowing characters to suit up in technologically advanced armor. Galactic Guardians is basically a higher powered version of GUII focusing on the galactic battle taking place within the game's setting and adds some more sci-fi elements into the game. Finally, Fighting the Ones Before gives GUII a more horror or heaven versus hell feel. What is great about all of this is that each of these fits right into the GUII setting.

The original GUII setting was tailored to directly accommodate these styles of play and instead of forcing the GM to come up with a load of adjustments and new material, the book has everything you need to play each of these genres within the Guardian Universe setting right there, saving any GM a lot of time. This is possibly the best part of the entire book. When you buy GUII, you aren't forcibly trapped in a completely comic book superhero genre game. Instead GUII gives you the core game with a focus on classic superheroes and then offers some other settings allowing the GM and the group to really play the game they want to play without all of the extra work. With most of my gaming group being constantly busy, including myself, the GM, this was incredibly helpful. Not only is all the material here, but it's also balanced within each mini-campaign and they are all good and fun.

The GM Section

This section is very helpful. While it is geared towards GMs, players may find some of the information here helpful as well. The section contains alternative methods of play which simplify the mechanics even more and reduce some of the math, which speeds up game play. This allows the system to be adjusted to various audiences and can simplify the games for younger kids to play as well. The section also contains all of the tables that are printed earlier in the book, with the exception of the one I noted was missing in the original printing earlier on in this review. This makes it so that the GM no longer has to waste precious time finding the right table to reference because they are all ordered by table number. It takes half the time to find the right table for a GM running the game on the fly than it would for them to flip through the entire book looking for the same table. It allows game sessions to run more smoothly which is certainly a plus.

It also contains other tables that didn't fit anywhere else in the book, including the most in-depth hazards table I have ever laid eyes on. I was downright amazed at how well thought out and streamlined that particular table was. The GM can throw almost anything at his players – anything from radiation to extreme temperatures and hurricanes and have the rules right at their fingertips.

Conclusion

To sum this up, Guardian Universe II is awesome. The game's system is really easy to learn and requires very little reading to get started right in. It allows the GM to focus more on story telling than rolling dice and stat blocks. Also, you aren't really paying for one game, but five. While the price seems a little high, GUII really makes sure you get your money's worth. If you're into superheroes and comic books, whether it is on the epic scale or even a more street-level batman scale, GUII has something to offer. It's suitable for both casual and serious gamers and can be used as a single-session filler or for an epic year-spanning campaign. Its content is suitable for most gamers, young and old alike and it's really easy to take The Basic System strait from GUII and write your own setting and campaigns for it due to the game's versatility.

Archetype: Superhero RPG

Body 11 (Game Mechanics): Learning the game is simple and the system is well balanced. Only a few powers are difficult to understand at first.

Mind 9 (Organization): The layout is pretty good, but sometimes led to some poor organization which kind of took away from the feel of the book. There was also a missing table in the original print, but since it's been fixed, it's kind of a moot point.

Spirit 11 (Look and Feel): The art is really good. I enjoyed the comic book style of this book and it's a lot of fun just to look through.

Attack 10 (Value of Content): The price is kind of high, but with full color art it is fairly understandable. Plus, you get a lot of good material here.

Defense 9 (Originality of Content): The game occasionally alludes to the likes of X-Men, Ghost Rider and the like, but the allusions seem to be fairly intentional, but a lot of the back story for the setting feels new and fresh.

Health 10 (Physical Quality): The book is a soft cover, but does seem to be holding up fairly well. A few bent corners have appeared after some hard use and a lot of travel, but nothing major.

Magic 12 (Options and Adaptability): The system is really easy to adapt to any genre or style of play. Plus, the GM section presents some alternate methods of playing the game to make the math easier. The game is incredibly versatile.