

# Catalyst

## A Champions Campaign

Our world. For all its wonders and terrors, it is a place where science has defined our environment. Other than the occasional UFO explained away as swamp gas, or the unpredictable nature of quantum physics, it is mundane. There are no supervillains plotting world domination, and no superheroes to save the day. Their powers would defy the laws of physics. Even if superheroes were possible, the chances of one appearing would be so improbable as to occur no more than a few times in the entire history of mankind.

But what if one element was added to our world – an unknown factor that changed the odds? A catalyst, making things like gamma radiation and lightning strikes potential sources of power instead of near-certain death? Superheroes would be rare at first, but more and more common over time. As mankind entered the technological age, the potential sources of superhuman individuals would increase exponentially. Nuclear power, genetic experimentation, and accidental technological breakthroughs would eventually add to the number of superheroes until they could no longer hide from the world.

This is the world of Catalyst. The rumors began in the 30's, of costumed crusaders thwarting crime only to disappear into the night. There were whispers of a secret war between the Axis and Allied powers, with individuals who could bend steel with their bare hands, or lift tanks with only the power of their mind. All but the dedicated conspiracy theorists dismissed them as fiction, writing them off as the hopes and fears of those wanting to find something beyond the mundane world, something modern science could not explain.

Those hopes and fears came true in 1986, during the 100-year anniversary celebrations for the Statue of Liberty. A superpowered individual named Hiroshima sought vengeance for the bombing of his homeland 40 years earlier, and announced that the statue would be destroyed at midnight. The army tried to stop him, and failed. Even if America was willing to kill its own citizens with a nuclear bomb, what were the chances of harming someone who claimed to control radiation?

Then, no longer able to hide in the shadows, nearly two dozen superheroes emerged at the stroke of midnight to fight Hiroshima. They won, fleeing the scene afterwards with the unconscious bodies of those who fell in the battle. That night, the world was changed forever.

Initially, the world reacted with awe...and fear. Hiroshima escaped several times, as no jail could hold him. Though casualties were minimal, fights between superheroes and supervillains caused extensive property damage. In this time of uncertainty, several measures were taken that would have far-reaching consequences on the world.

The first action taken against superhumans (called Primes in a leaked government report) was the sentencing of Hiroshima in absentia. A few months later, after he was defeated, he was taken to

a secret government lab in the Nevada desert where his death sentence would be carried out. As he died, the nuclear energy in his cells was released to catastrophic effect. Though fallout was minimal, the explosion could be seen from orbit. After this tragedy, Congress passed a law banning the use of the death penalty against superpowered individuals unless it could be proven beyond a reasonable doubt that their death would not be a hazard to others.

The second action taken against Primes was the Metahuman Registration Act. All individuals with superpowers would be required to register their identities with both federal and state law enforcement. In addition, the government reserved the right to call upon them for military service “as needed for national security”. As the bill was debated in Congress, America’s most prominent Prime (a telekinetic named Teke) appeared on national television to state that if the law was passed, he would hang up his cape and forever keep his abilities hidden. Most Primes took the hint, and disappeared from the public eye for a full week. Crime ran rampant, and many high-profile targets such as the Federal Reserve were assaulted. The public outcry not only killed the bill, but created a new law to protect superheroes. Dubbed the “Good Samaritan” act by the media, this Constitutional amendment protects the right of superpowered individuals to hide their identities in public, until such time as they are proven guilty in a court of law and their appeals are exhausted. This has caused no end of headaches for judges, especially when common thugs have claimed having some obscure superpower in order to keep their identities hidden.

The final action against Primes was initiated not by the federal government, but by three states (California, Texas, and New York) where superpowered activity was particularly common. Lawsuits were filed against a dozen different superheroes to recoup massive losses from property damage. Most of the superheroes sued disappeared from public view, and many began to fear a repeat of the fallout from the Metahuman Registration Act. Fortunately, the superhero known as Technomancer offered his services to the government, helping them create a disaster response team that would repair the worst of the damage at no charge. This team, known as the PRS (Prime Repair Squad), has a mandate to deploy at any location that suffers more than one million dollars of Prime-related damage. Their resources are stretched thin, which has caused Technomancer to retire from superheroing in order to devote his full time to the project. It is only the efforts of the PRS that has kept insurance rates reasonable in cities with known Primes.

The world of Catalyst is different from our own. And yet, there are many similarities. The average citizen still works a 9 to 5 job, and hasn’t benefited from the technological advances that governments are slowly acquiring from Primes. Other than a slight shift from celebrity-worship to superhero-worship, society is unchanged. With the exception of a few cities like Manhattan, Middleton, and Bayport, life continues as normal, with superheroes something you only see on television.

No one knows where the next hotbed of Prime activity will be. It could be Chicago, Seattle...or a virtually unknown city in the Midwest. No one heard of Middleton, Texas or Bayport, California until Primes appeared there – both cities now are on the top 10 list of most advanced urban centers in the world, thanks in part to the extensive work of the PRS in making destroyed buildings better than they were before. And throughout these times of change, the government has never stopped looking for what creates Primes – the Catalyst.