

(For comparison's sake, there were about 24,000 murders every year in the United States in the 1990s, give or take; if Talent only triggers during attempted murder, 24 new American Talents emerged in the 1990s—primarily African-American males, of course.)

You can still use the table as a more general guideline for the level of “background” trauma in the nations concerned, if you don't want to be pinned down to murders as the only trigger; it's a good bet that if 200,000 people are being slaughtered in a civil war, there are plenty of other traumas to go around, too. Possibly even radioactive spider bites, as labs get looted and security procedures generally go to pot.

Obviously, a world of trauma-driven Talents will look considerably different from traditional comic-book universes. In any given decade (except the 1940s), for example, the overwhelming majority of Talents are quite likely from China or the Third World. Does a Ugandan army of Talents conquer Africa in the 1970s? Which Ugandan army? If Talents spring up on both sides of a civil war, after all, that might cancel out any larger geopolitical impact. Along those lines, if an army of Talents invades some hapless nation, their own depredations might produce more Talents for the resistance!

This brings up another consideration: How any given distribution of Talents affects the world also depends on which side the Talents take. A patriotic Russian soldier who discovers his Talent in Afghanistan will be more likely to support the Communist Party and the Soviet regime than a dissident Russian prisoner who gains his Talent while being worked to death in Siberia. Which Talents take which sides will also alter the equation: Either the soldier or the prisoner might wind up a 13,000-point Superman while the other only becomes a 5-point Color Kid.

As You Like It

This section hasn't necessarily covered all the possibilities, but the basic outlines of your present world should be fairly clear by now. Feel free to tweak the axes of design and the distribution and numbers of Talents until your world feels like the one you want to run games in. Once those basic parameters are set up, it's time to design the world to fit them.

Times Without Number

The number of potential alternate histories, even without throwing Talents into the mix, is essentially infinite. Whole shelves full of books this size could be written setting out the hinge points of history

most suitable for superheroic tampering. Almost all of them appear in the Alternate History List at www.uchronia.net. This section will have to remain at a slightly higher level of generality.

Rather than attempt anything like universality, this section will run through the ages with an eye, primarily, for campaign design and high-powered adventure rather than the eddies and swirls of historical inertia.

We Who Are About To Fly Salute You

It's easy—in fact, it's very tempting—to run a *really* godlike campaign set in the ancient Bronze Age, featuring an invulnerable Achilles, a super-strong Heracles, a Hypercunning Odysseus, and so forth. Given the vagueness of both the original epics and modern historical recreations, it's barely worth the effort to develop an alternate history at all—the real 13th century B.C. (or thereabouts) has plenty of adventure and murky corners.

On the other hand, it's easy enough to tweak things to suit your own interests and aesthetics—Akhenaten makes a dandy mutant, for example, and the Assyrians (who invented ethnic cleansing, among other things) make awesome Nazis for a grim and gritty ancient world. Turning solar-obsessed Egyptian theocracy or elite Assyrian death squads up to four-color eleven should be the work of a moment.

However, the combination of distant change points and historical obscurity makes the ancient world an unlikely source for a “modern-day” alternate history. The major exception, of course, is a surviving Roman Empire—the Romans are familiar enough from televised epics and our own cultural debt that we can easily transpose gladiators and legions into terms both modern and parahuman. Perhaps something in the Roman imperial military cult—an invocation of Jupiter Facultus, perhaps, or an element of the Mithraic Mysteries—actually instilled Talent in the legions, or at least in a few “ultra-milesi.” Although it's tempting to give the Romans overwhelming military Talents, the historical Romans had a pretty amazing military edge that wasn't enough, in the final analysis, to hold off the Fall.

Another fix for the Romans is a Hyperbrain (or a whole colony of them) at the Library and Museum of Alexandria who conveniently invent gunpowder, internal combustion, or whatever else you deem necessary to perpetuate the Caesars down to the modern day. (Of course, if the Industrial Revolution happens in the 2nd century A.D., the “modern day” may well be the comput-



erized, sophisticated global Roman imperium of 406 A.D.) A similar set of twists can perpetuate Alexander's empire, or (with a few changes of scene) the Maurya in India, the Han in China, or the Achaemenid Persians.

Whosoever Can Lift This Castle Is Rightwise King of England

But eventually, the empires fell, and were replaced by tens or hundreds of tiny, squabbling kingdoms. Who sets up a kingdom in the Dark Ages? The strongest fighter, or the one with the best armor. Which is to say, in a Wild Talented world, a parahuman. Even if the old empires of the classical era could muddle through with ruthless normal rulers and the inertia of civilization keeping the Talents in line, once the barbarians pour through (or fly over) the gates, all bets are off. Eventually, things shake out; the Talented divvy up the spoils and settle down to run things. King Arthur's knights, Charlemagne's paladins, the bogatyrs of the Russian epics—all super-teams under one Hypercommand.

So, are Talents hereditary? If so, the “divine right of kings” becomes the “divine origin story of kings.” This kind of eugenic feudalism can be the excuse for a genuinely medieval-seeming society perpetuating itself for centuries down the ages. If you want a 21st century of jousts and castles—and the Inquisition burning mutants in the cathedral squares of New Castile—this is how it happens. In our history, it was primarily people outside the rule of the feudal elite—townsmen, monks, and so forth—who created

the economic and technical means to end feudalism. If the nobles are genuinely better than common folk, will that kind of spirit still exist?

This same question, of course, becomes relevant whenever and wherever Talents emerge. If Talented parents breed Talented children, the political implications become crystal clear—to both Talents and normals—in any society ruled by competition, be it medieval Scotland or modern California.

The Da Vinci Talent

The Renaissance is another prime opportunity for a Hyperbrain-driven early Industrial Revolution, complete with Sforza steam-tanks, Borgia radio propaganda, and Medici death-rays. The era is also full of brightly colorful characters getting into deadly fights for no good reason—as good a place as any to hold a superheroic campaign. A dominant Italy (whether unified under Pope Julius II or divided by dueling Hypercities) could have emerged before 1494 (when the French invaded Italy and humiliated Florence) or as late as 1528 (when the Germans invaded Italy and accidentally destroyed Rome). Failing that, a suitable feel can be arranged with a Spanish victory over Elizabeth of England in 1588, and there's always the apocalypse of the Thirty Years' War—which even without Talents managed to kill a third of Germany and Bohemia from 1618 to 1648.

The Renaissance saw itself as a time of rediscovery—a rebirth of the ancient knowledges and arts. Could those include the ancient secrets of Talent?

