

VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

VIPER: Coils Of The Serpent is a villain organization book for the Champions Universe from Hero Games. VIPER is a technologically oriented criminal organization bent on world conquest.

Chapter One - History Of The Snake. VIPERs history in the Champions Universe dates back thousands of years, to the Valdorian Age Setting. The organization itself is nowhere near that old however, only it's roots go back that far. VIPER has existed in several different incarnations at various times, and many of those are outlined here. This sets up the book as a framework that can be used in several different genres, and in several different ways. It is worth noting that the organization presented in detail in this book was formed after World War Two, and does not inherit the legacy of ages. Unless you want it to, in which case a few details are easily changed. If you need them to be a hundreds years old criminal syndicate the groundwork is there.

Chapter Two - A Thousand Venoms. Here we get into the organization as it exists today, starting with the Philosophy And Goals, Recruitment Methods, and Hierarchy. This makes them more than just a group of well armed thugs, putting motivation and method behind VIPER, and making them that much more dangerous. The organization is lead by the Supreme Serpent and under him is the Council Of Thirty, each responsible for a portion of the world. Like any good world spanning group VIPER is everywhere, with a Political Division infiltrating governments, Financial making and moving money, Technical creating all their weapons and other technologies, but the vast bulk of them are in the Criminal Division - going out and looting the world for fun and profit. VIPER World Wide looks at where the organization exists in the world, and to what extent. Through all this though, VIPER is still just a big collection of criminals and VIPER Internal Politics addresses this, and how they work, and don't work, together.

Chapter Three - Fangs Of The Serpent. As mentioned, the vast majority of VIPER is part of the Criminal Division, which means agents dressed in yellow and green military gear committing crimes with high tech weapons. Which this chapter more than covers. From how to build a VIPER Agent, from basic to advanced and specialized agents. Thirty Seven Package Deals for creating agents are provided, allowing you to create a wide variety of criminal agent to pit against the Players. You could even use these as the basis for any well trained criminal organization, not just VIPER. But Agents aren't just numbers on the sheet, the next section goes even further to create individuals. Agent Types And Motivations is a series of personalities and attitudes you can use to create different types of agents, this is especially useful if VIPER is a major part of your organization and you want to involve the Players in interacting with the criminals. If the Players capture a VIPER Agent for later questioning you

can also use this section to provide some idea of how that agent will respond. Thirteen Agent types and nine Nest Leader types are provided.

Chapter Four - Nests Of The VIPER. A VIPER base is called a nest, continuing with the snake theme. From small bases to elaborate demesnes, this chapter details the places VIPER hides in, retreats to and ultimately, where the heroes will stop them. Nest Characteristics covers the common elements to every VIPER base of operations, typical locations, security, other facilities and the kinds of nests VIPER has. Organization And Structure breaks down how a nests hierarchy works, which is different from the generalized organization breakdown. A VIPER base is designed to be more or less self sufficient. This section looks at how a nest operates internally, with it's own conflicts and goals. And also looks at how it interacts with VIPER at large, from what is expected of it to interacting with other nests. Example Nests puts all that together and provides a picture of two complete nests, one in Chicago and the other in New York City. It also provides important information on several other nests, including the four Supreme Nests from which VIPER's leaders control the organization.

Chapter Five - The VIPER Armory. The first part of this chapter is just a collection of weapons, equipment, armor, and vehicles that VIPER uses on it's war to take over the planet. All the equipment you could need to fight against the Superheroes of the Players. VIPER Science looks at the many projects the organization is working on to various ends, from creating immortality for its leaders to doomsday weapons to hold the world hostage. It also provides the personalities of seven VIPER scientists to use in your plots, and the kinds of things they're most likely to be working on.

Chapter Six - The Dragon Branch. Ultimately, VIPER as presented in the book is designed to exist in a Superhero campaign, and that means it will eventually need Supervillains on its side. Ten Supervillains have write-ups in this chapter, with notes on close to twenty more. They range in power and motivation, from big thug to the really heavy guns. Some of the supervillains were created by VIPER experiments, and some joined up for their own reasons. There are enough ideas for these villains to make them more than just the adversaries for the Players, though they can certainly be used that way.

Chapter Seven - VIPER Campaigning. This chapter covers actually using VIPER in a campaign in more detail. VIPER Scenarios looks at how the group would go about planning and executing a plot, and the problems that might arise. Two scenarios are looked at specifically, Hostage Situations and the problem of Telepathy being used to find VIPER bases. While they're presented from a VIPER solution point of view, they're some general good advice for these fairly common situations in a Superhero game. Agents In Combat looks at the possible problems, and their solutions, to having large numbers of agent level characters in a fight with the Hero System. There is also a section of tactics that VIPER could use, as well as a list of fifteen tricks they can use to spice up combat. The Champions Universe takes a looks at how VIPER interacts with various other groups and villains in the Champions Universe itself. If you're using many, or all, the elements from the source books from Hero Games this section helps put VIPER in place in the world and how it interacts with the motivations of others.

VIPER Genre By Genre takes a look at using the organization in a setting other than Superheroes. As mentioned in Chapter One, the idea of VIPER goes back a long way, though in different times it was a drastically different type of organization. For the Champions genre it looks at using VIPER as a Major Threat to be taken very seriously, the default level presented in the book, as the clowns in green and as a "realistic" group. Commando Hero looks at using VIPER as the main enemy in a Heroic game where the Players are part of a counter-organization to the VIPER threat (such as UNTIL, another organization book for the setting). Other genres looked at are Fantasy, Pulp, Cyber, and Star Hero. VIPER As The Good Guys puts a twist on the group and turns them into the good guys, if occasionally ruthless. Three different scenarios are put forth where VIPER can be cast as the saviors, by far the

most interesting is the Post-Apocalyptic Setting.

The book ends with Agent Templates, which are character sheets for the eight most likely Agents to be used in a game.

The book presents a well thought out and organized criminal organization that uses military tactics and advanced technology to get its way.

The Downside:

The book does an excellent job of creating a framework for the organization. What's missing is some space dedicated to going into a little more detail of various Nest Leaders and how exactly they see each other, the organization and their own goals. The leadership's goals are well looked at, but some more goals from lower down on the chain would have been nice, though not required.

The Otherside:

If you need a paramilitary criminal organization in your campaign this is the book I recommend. While they're presented as a world wide organization it wouldn't take much to scale them back to a national group of some nature. This is a good book, presenting an organization that can be used at several levels, and not just in a Superhero setting. Coupled with the UNTIL: Defenders Of Freedom source book you can put to roughly equal opposing organizations into your campaign and watch the sparks fly.

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