

Vibora Bay

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

Vibora Bay is a setting book for the Champions line from Hero Games, it details a mystically oriented city in the panhandle of Florida. Like most Hero Games settings this one drags you into it's pages with a rich narrative and interesting locations.

The introduction sets a nice tone, starting out with short scenes of the prominent heroes and some villains of the city and giving a bit of each of their unique views.

Chapter One - A History Of Vibora Bay. Vibora Bay itself is a completely fictional city, occupying a stretch of the panhandle in Florida. The city itself is built near a large swamp. Just because it's made up doesn't mean it can't have a rich history made up along with it. This short chapter covers the major events and general feeling of various eras since it was founded. Just enough detail is given to help GMs and Players out when building back stories and backgrounds for characters. But there's also plenty of room to insert your own details to fill the history out even more.

Chapter Two - The Lay Of The Land. This chapter covers the climate and geography of Vibora Bay. It's a pretty strait forward, if brief, description of the major parts of the city. Included is a short section on the city government including the mayor and important officials. The maps are nice, but small. This chapter could do with some expanding and some descriptive flavor to give each part of the city it's own feel. But it does a decent job of providing the lay of the land.

Chapter Three - A Day In The Life. This chapter starts to insert some local color into the city, giving it a more vibrant and unique feel. Starting with the mundane acts of transportation (but an important part of any city), colleges and universities, and the local media (television, radio, and newspapers). It moves into the cities entertainment hi lighting a few hotspots and nightclubs.

The various subcultures are covered next. Starting with Superhumans in Vibora Bay, the city is intended for mystic and lower powered Superheroes (vs Millennium Cities Standard Superhero setting), The premiere hero of the city has a write-up here, the Black Mask. The Mystic World is gone over next, given a little more space than other aspects given the cities deep connection to the mystical side of things, Dr. Ka is written up here, and a number of lesser but prominent mystics are outlined. The Business World is broken down into several sections, covering how their importance to the city and giving a number of businesses based out of the city. The include Shipping And Transportation (one of the cities main businesses); Industrial and Manufacturing; Oil, Chemicals and

Medical Technology; Legal and Financial Services; Agriculture and Aquaculture; Small Shops, Cafes and Retail Stores. All of these combine to paint a picture of a complete city that you can easily build a vivid picture of. The Martial World is covered next, providing not only a martial oriented hero (Redsnake) but a completely unique Martial Art for the city, Vibora Carmesi. This is a really cool touch that helps the book really stand out as not just another city supplement. The Military World covers the Navy and Air Force installations that are nearby the city. The Religious World is last, providing another unique aspect of the city, The High Apostolic Church. The Church is an offshoot of a number of faiths, which helps to provide a religious element to the city alongside the other mystic elements.

It's this chapter that really helps make the books stand out and provide the details to a city rich in culture, dichotomy and mystery.

Chapter Four - Cops And Robbers. Good guys and Bad guys make for any great story. And in Vibora Bay the contrast of opposing forces is strong. Starting with the law enforcement officials of the city. The city has two people heading up the police (The Chief Of Police and The Police Commissioner) with similar philosophies but diverging approaches. The various forces of the city are each given space, detailing the police force itself, MARS (Metahuman Activities Response Squad), the prisons, federal agencies, UNTIL (the United Nations' superhuman response organization), PRIMUS (the United States own version of UNTIL), and other Superhuman allies of the city. Four more heroes are written-up in this part of the book, Amphibian (a low key hero as interested in protecting the waters as he is in preventing crime); Brother Thunder and Sister Rain (both practitioners of Voodoo who works together to keep the west end of the city safe), Juryrig (the thorn in the side of VIPER locally).

And then we move into the criminal element of the city. First mundane crime, we get information on the cities three most prominent gangs. The Sweetland Mob, the mafia's local branch (Though it is noted that like always the patriarch the Family is named for has no provable connection to crime). Sweetland controls most of the upper and middle class crime, with control of the cities politicians as much as actual crime. Clark Robinson is Sweetland's main competition running on the bad side of town controlling things closer to the street level side of criminal activity. The Sovereign Sons are the wild card element, getting in every bodies way, moving about as they please and generally making what would otherwise be a simple split down the middle a problem. Five other street gangs are described as well, these are gangs that control a few blocks of territory and are not movers and shakers in the criminal world.

Superhuman Crime is the last part of the chapter, this actually covers non-mundane criminals as much as actual Supervillains. A short section describes the types of Supervillains the city does attract. There are three costumed criminals (though not Superhuman) described as well. The Supercriminal Organizations covers the activities of VIPER, DEMON and Argent within the city, or lack thereof as apparently Argent has little to do with Vibora Bay which should be a relief for the heroes.

Chapter Five - Hot Spots For Cool Heroes. Here we have eight prominent locations in detail. The Mahogany Club is an all-male exclusive club for the movers and shakers of the business world, but otherwise unremarkable from all appearances. The Sterling Manor is a building steeping in mystery, and currently owned by a wealthy businessman whose bored wife who runs weddings and other events out of it. While the Sterling Manor provides a subtle mystic twist (to all appearances), Gabriel's Alley almost forces the strange onto, Gabriel is an old man with a lot of wisdom and patience who occupies an alley near the waterfront. Those who come into the alley eventually realize that there is enough hope left to carry on. The Sixth Chakra on the other hand is an exercise in pure mystical kitsch, while the city may be filled with strange and mystical events none of them are to be found here, maybe. The Crabtree Building is one of the cities oldest office buildings, home to many prestigious businesses, and a number of smaller ones that prefer to be unnoticed amongst the

towering glass and steel offices of modern architecture, like many things in a city with a lot to hide this building has it's own quirks. The White Har Motel is pretty much exactly as advertised, a run down old hotel with a restaurant that never closes and subsequently a large portion of the city passes through it for a bite to eat. Sweetland's Restaurant, owned by alleged mobster Guy Sweetland is a super snooty and very good French restaurant. And where there are alleged mobsters there are alleged mobster deals going on, upstairs in a private dining room of course. Lastly is Marty's Place - a shop that holds just about anything, run by a family. You can get a number of needed goods in the shop, a bite to eat at the counter off to one side, or out front you'll find a newsstand that can get you a subscription to any periodical in print anywhere on the planet.

Combined with Chapter Three a very real city is brought to life in the pages of the book. Locations and people are detailed in side bars and text boxes throughout both chapters and go a long way to providing more than just pages of descriptive text.

Chapter Six - Gamemastering Vibora Bay. Vibora Bay is intended for a mystical bent to be brought up in the game setting, even the center of it. As such it has it's own long history of why it's such a mystical stronghold.

One thing that is made clear here is that Vibora Bay is a setting designed to look into opposites and how they interact. The city itself is divided neatly in half (poor and rich) by a single long wide street. Polar opposites are found everywhere you look in the city, and the GMs Chapter goes into some of the why of it. I won't reveal the Big Secret of Vibora Bay in this review, but I will say if you want to run a game contrasting the idea of opposites (good/evil, black/white, yin/yang) then this is a very good setting to do it in.

The GMs Vault goes into the truth behind the text in the first five chapters, dispelling or reinforcing rumors, or providing plot seeds and story fodder for others.

Lastly, there are some more villains provided specific to the city. Cirque Sinister is a group of rather disturbed outlaws operating out of a sanitarium outside city limits. This group of five villains can provide a lot of scenarios that are non-standard as their motivations as a group shift from moment to moment much less scenario to scenario. Beyond that group there are three more villains. Al The Alligator Man (the classic misunderstood monster); Deadman Walkin' (a heartless monster Players love to put down without remorse); and Mr. Gemini (a more subtle villain who has the ability to duplicate himself).

The book is great, considering there are four authors that worked on this there is a seamless integration of each of their writings. No weird anomalies and contradictions that pop up when multiple writers get involved are here.

If you need a lower powered setting, or want to run a mystic campaign this is a good place to put it.

The Downside:

The book is fairly thin, if any improvement could be done it should get the kind of detail that Hudson City has. Giving each neighborhood more room to provide details would flesh this source book out perfectly.

And a nice big map of the city - this is my only actual complaint. Maps of cities should take up at least a full page, as is the only map of the city is half a page.

The Otherside:

Being a setting book anyone can use the book to set up a game in their preferred system. The Hero System elements (all contained in character write-ups) are pushed to the side and easily ignored or converted. Leaving a good rich city to work with.

The book has a lot of potential. If you want to run a plain mystic oriented game removing the Superhuman elements is easy. Likewise if you want to run a Modern game similar to Dark Champions but with more of the strange involved than the Hudson City book provides this is a good city source book to use. In fact the book comes with advice on using this source book for Dark Champions, Fantasy and Star Hero campaigns instead of Champions. And even for Champions Vibora Bay is a great alternative to the ultramodern Millennium City which can be a bit squeaky clean for some gamers. Simply put - the book is versatile and well written.

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