

Hidden Lands

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

Hidden Lands explores the time honored tradition of secret places to explore in a Superheroic, or Comic Book, setting. While it was written for Champions it can easily be adapted to Pulp Hero, and to some extent other genres as well.

The book is divided into Five sections, three of which each cover a specific society in detail, one chapter covers a few places in a lot less detail and one chapter is dedicated to just GM knowledge of the other chapters.

Chapter One - Atlantis. The legend of the sunken island, or city depending on the legend. In the Champions Universe Atlantis is the remnants of a High Magic setting before the world was in it's current continental configuration, when their age ended the land sunk into the sea, their God gave some of the last people the ability to breath underwater and the Kingdom Of Atlantis was born. It covers the history of the underwater city, the culture, it's magic and society and information on creating an Atlantean Character. For a setting that doesn't feature aliens from outer space this is a good alternative for players who want to play Characters that are strangers to modern culture and society, a form of 'alien' type character without being extraterrestrial.

This chapter also comes with rules for dealing with underwater adventures. It covers the environment itself looking at light, pressure and temperature, with a set of rules for dealing with immense pressure of being deep underwater. Breathing, Perception, Communication, and Moving are all also covered. It also covers various System Elements, looking at how Skills, Talents and various Powers work deep underwater. Two sections are of particular note, first is how various common Special Effects would work underwater (Ice, Water, Fire, Acid, Light among others), and Underwater Combat which covers how fighting is affected by being in water.

Chapter Two - Arcadia. Arcadia is a city hidden in a valley in Antarctica with an ancient race of Immortals created by alien visitors hundreds of thousands of years ago. The Emypreans are a race of superhuman immortals that walk amongst us. Their society is small, and they keep their city a secret from the world. In fact they often join the normal world under false identities. In a standard superhuman setting you can use them as an origin story for a Superhero, or an entire team of Superheroes. In a different genre you can strip them of their superpowers but keep them as a mysterious race of immortals, this works especially well in conspiracy style games. The history of the Emypreans and Arcadia spans most of the Hero System Metaverse, allowing them to be used in other settings as well, including Turakian Age (where they can be mighty heroes), Valdorian Age, Tuala

Morn, and even into the future as part of a Galactic Champions game. Even without their secret city you can use them as a super secret race of advanced humans in the background of a campaign.

Chapter Three - Other Hidden Lands. Four more hidden places are looked at, though no in as much detail as the first two. Shamballah and Agharti are two cities hidden deep under Mt. Everest, one is a city of good Monks who hold the secret of many martial arts, the other a city of evil martial artists trapped there forever. This pair of cities can be used in any campaign featuring Martial Arts, either as a prominent aspect or as a background element for a Character, who may have studied some ancient forgotten art as their back story.

The Well Of Worlds is a dimensional portal under Ayers Rock in Australia. It uses aspects from the Australian Dreamworld and their legends of the world. More broadly it can be used in a campaign that wants to involve Dimensional Travel, or even a Dimensional Invasion.

Sunday Pond, Maine. Any good setting could use a sleepy little town with some very strange stuff going on. The Champions Universe has Sunday Pond, Maine where odd things are reported, a good focus for a Mystically centered campaign, or simply as a single story arc for the weird.

Beast Mountain is a village in the Ukraine of beast-men, animals given anthropomorphic form by the evil Dr. Phillippe Moreau, descendant of Henri Moreau of "Island Of Doctor Moreau" fame. Attempting to recreate his ancestors experiments he built a lab in secluded location in the mountains. His first success was the Champions Universe character known as Dr. Silverback. After that he created several Beast-Men and used them to rob the world to get more supplies. After he was defeated and captured the Beast-Men, who aren't inherently evil, were allowed to live in seclusion. Though a few have left their village to explore the world. Beast Mountain can be used in a few ways, first as a Character origin story, or if they feel threatened as villains that aren't entirely evil. After all as civilization encroaches on nature they may feel attacked and fight back.

All four Hidden Lands presented here are good for short story arcs, though it's possible to base entire campaigns around them (notably Beast Mountain and Shamballah are the better of the candidates for that) they work better as Character origins in greater campaigns.

Chapter Four - Gamemastering Hidden Lands. If you need some ideas for using the six hidden lands presented so far this chapter provides some advice. It also contains a GMs Vault which reveals some the truths behind the rumors and myths presented in the first three chapters. As well as five villainous NPCs (two from Atlantis, one from Arcadia, and one each from Shamballah, Well Of Worlds and Sunday Pond).

Chapter Five - Lemuria. This Hidden Land is intended for GMs only as well as it's main use is as a villainous people. Lemurians are the ancient enemies of the Emphyreans, and to some extent the Atlanteans. They're society is based on the labour of a slave race of Mole-Men and on their Sorcery-Engines, ancient machines powered by strange magics. The Lemurians are a race as old as the Atlanteans (in fact they're from the same era in the Hero Universe). The Lemurians can make for an interesting Master Villain, their King (an exiled Emphyrean) is a Master Villain in his own right, and he has an entire underwater city and slave race to exploit. If you're using Arcadia or any Player wants to use the Emphyreans as a background then Lemuria is an almost perfect Campaign Villain, they can also be used as a recurring group of villains or in a single story rather well.

The Downside:

There are several other Hidden Lands and People hinted at in other Champions Source books. Seeing a few of them in more detail here would have been nice, specifically the Naga's mentioned in the back

of The Mystic World and Monster Island from the Champions Universe book. Both of those would have been excellent additions, the first doubly so if you're using The Sylvestri Clan from Arcane Adversaries as villains in your campaign.

The Otherside:

Hidden Lands provides a number of interesting places and ideas you can use either as background for a Character, focus for a campaign or simply in a story arc. With the exception of the Underwater Rules and Character Write-ups the book is completely Systemless, making it easy for anyone to use these settings in their own campaigns. Each setting is interesting and none of them feel like the same idea rehashed to a different mold, they would all be a good addition to a Campaign that wants a bit of the mysterious added into it.

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