

Hudson City

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

Hudson City: The Urban Abyss is a setting book for Dark Champions. For those who aren't familiar with Dark Champions, or are familiar with the original sourcebook, this is not Street-Superheroes. Hudson City takes a look at campaigning in a crime ridden, corrupt modern city. Located in New Jersey. Hudson City paints a picture of a city filled with urban rot, corruption and under the iron grip of organized crime. In other words, Hudson City is the perfect place for a modern setting with a dark overlay.

The setting assumes the moderately small scope of a large urban center, world changing events are not the focus. The vigilantes themselves walk a thin moral line.

Chapter One - A History Of Hudson City. The first chapter is relatively short, seven pages of history from inception to the modern day. It covers how the city was founded, major events that define it's history and some important historical figures.

Chapter Two - The Lay Of The Land. This chapter covers the city itself. The first part is Urbanography, starting with the general layout of the streets as the city planners organized the overall city. Major landmarks that may get known outside the city are covered, as well as weather. A short bit on Hudson City underground is covered (including a text box on Rats and Roaches, everyone's favorite vermin), and all the major utilities are gone over. Part two is Getting Around and provides information on airports in the area, ground vehicle travel (cars, taxis, buses), commuter railways (the city has both Elevated Rail and Subways), and the ferries that cross the river from North Side to South Side.

Next each of the twenty-six major neighborhoods in the city, which includes LeMastre Park and The Suburbs which aren't actual neighborhoods but warrant their own sections. The twenty-four actual neighborhoods, defined just as much by social standing as geographical area, opens with a quote that would be typical for the area (or conversation). A history and general disposition of the area today. Sections on landmarks in the area (known only to the neighborhood or to the city at large), shopping (or just where residents go to get things), and 'on the town' which covers hangout spots. Some neighborhoods contain additional information as it's warranted, for instance Little Italy has a discussion on the Mafia within the neighborhoods context. This is the meat of the book, where the city itself is presented, it goes a long way to providing a vivid backdrop against which the rest of the book sits.

The last section of Chapter Two is City Government. The city Mayor and his Deputy Mayors take up

the first part. The city council and various city commissions also get space, giving a look into how the city keeps itself operating on a day to day basis. Politics is also covered, how the city is united, polarized and divides itself politically amongst its many factions and neighborhoods. There is also a mention of the State and Federal Governments presence within the city.

Chapter Three - A Day In The Life. The first section, Life In The Big City, covers the rhythm of the city, annual events and slang. The rhythm of the city is a nice feature that describes the general activity level of the city through a typical day, what generally goes on at what hours and the traffic flow (or lack of it). Annual events describes the various major holidays that the city, either as a whole or only within a select neighborhood, celebrates every year. Slang covers just that, some of the slang specific to the cities denizens, with some general slang everyone would know.

Chapter Four - The Long Arm Of The Law. The first section is the one most PCs will encounter, local law enforcement. The police, how they're organized, distributed, and just how corrupt they seem to be, as well as response times in various neighborhoods once someone calls the cops. The next very short section covers the Federal Agencies, the FBI, DEA and BATF. Then the corrections and court system is covered, going over the judicial system is just enough detail to make use of in a game. The fire department gets a few pages next giving statistics and some organizational information. Finally, vigilantes in the city get covered, giving publicly known information on the seven most known and notable (or infamous) vigilante's operating in the city.

Chapter Five - Predators. Hudson City is full of crime, and this is where it's detailed in all it's evil glory. Starting with Organized Crime in the first section. Each organization has information on it's history in the city, the part of the city they claim as territory, and how they relate to each other and other organizations. Each organization is not a solidified whole, within them are warring factions, different gangs and families. The organizations covered are The Mafia, Chinese Tongs, Hispanic Organized Crime, Russian Organized Crime, Vietnamese Gangs, The Yakuza, Outlaw Biker Gangs, and miscellaneous Street Gangs and Posses. While there isn't extensive information on each organization, mostly it's how they interact within the city, leaving the GM to build each entity specifically, though some guidelines such as number of members, major leaders and bosses, is provided.

The next section covers the other major criminal element, Costumed Criminals. Or more accurately major criminals that aren't associated with the above groups and have a particular theme, or shtick. The ones covered here are Card Shark, Charlemagne, Diomedes, Janus, The Kyphotic Man, and Speargun. There is some information on their organizations, how they operate and specific goals. Like above it's mostly up to the GM to really flesh them out in the game. With the exception of Card Shark and The Kyphotic Man all of these are outlined in much more detail in the Predators book, the other two get detailed information in this book.

The last section covers Other Crime. These are crimes that are either common to all groups, or stand out on their own. Covered here are Arms Trafficking, Gambling and The Sex Trade. While you can run Hudson City crime with the information provided in this chapter easily enough, having the Predators enemies book goes a long way to filling in a lot of details for you should you want to reduce some of the set up work you want to do.

Chapter Six - Hot Spots For Cool Heroes. This chapter gives detailed information on six locations in Hudson City, from the low brow to the high class. These are places that can feature in campaigns, or good examples of the type of establishment they represent. First is Avenue Of The Elms, an outdoor shopping area located in Worthington, a middle-to-upper class area. It's a good example of a typical shopping center environment, scale back the types of shops and you can put it in lower class areas, fairly common in many major cities. Next is Collins Guns And Surplus, selling firearms and related

material. Nothing too interesting about the location itself, though most Hudson City games will need guns, and thus gun shops. You can use Collins (and the provided map at the back of the book) as a base for any type of gun shop around the city. Hudson City Fish Market is next, while it's not easily adaptable to other types of locations it can be turned into a open meat market, large shopping area, and the like. A good example of possibly mafia controlled business in the city. Little Egypt is a higher class strip club, and possibly a brothel in the back rooms. A den of vice that can be easily used to create any level of seedy bar in the city. Longview Correctional Facility, should be used as is. Sooner or later the local prison will feature into your game, and detailed information on Longview will be useful covering the prison guards and various factions within the prison population. The Skyline Club is a high class bar and restaurant, where any super rich PC worth their money belongs, getting involved in high powered deals and the like. Last is Quickcorner, what's a city without a lot of twenty-four hour convenience stores, a map of a typical Quickcorner is provided in the back when a gunfight breaks out in one.

The six locations are well detailed, thought out and cover most types of places a game is likely to encounter.

Chapter Seven - Game Mastering Hudson City. The first part covers types and styles of campaigns the Hudson City is primarily intended for, and information on how to adapt it to campaigns beyond that, like Fantasy or Superheroic. A good solid set of suggestions to get you started are here. The next section reveals the underbelly of the city, going over the previous six chapters with the real truths behind the 'facts' and rumors presented, whose corrupt, who isn't and what really goes on in some of the many locations described. Two characters are written-up in section two, The Kyphotic Man (doctor to the underworld) and Cleopatra (owner of Little Egypt). The next section is allies providing write-ups for three of the cities most prominent hero-vigilantes. The first is the mostly plot-device Harbringer Of Justice, who is far more powerful than some PC Teams. Then Renegade who is built on more points than a starting PC, so is a good example of an experienced vigilante. And finally Scarecrow, who is a good example of a starting vigilante, built on the same points as most starting PCs. All three are good examples of various power levels you can work with inside Hudson City.

Then next two sections are villains. The first is Card Shark's organization, one of the 'costumed' villains in the city who operates a large gang. A good campaign long adversary for a game. The next part has six other villains written up, covering a wide variety of villains types. The completely insane Cainite, El Condenado is your typical hit man, The Kaleidoscope Man is good for espionage campaigns or games with some mystery in them, Shango is one of the cities man gang lords controlling part of Freetown, Siddhartha is a example of vigilantism gone wrong, and Takayake Shinsaku is a crime boss competing against the Yakuza as a whole.

Overall, the book presents a very detailed urban arena to have a campaign take place in. Between all the various crimes, crime groups, city issues and various areas you can easily use the book to base a long campaign completely within the confines of Hudson City.

A few points really stand out to make this an excellent resource. First in the back is a street finder index, using the map of page 17 to help you find streets within the city. Next is an Organized Crime Chart that helps you figure out the alliances, wars and various dealings between the cities major underworld groups. And then there's what I consider probably the best part of the book, in the sidebars throughout the entire book, indeed on at least half the pages, are various people and characters that work and live in the city. Thus the books comes with a large number of NPCs from the mundane to the important in it, and each one appears near the relevant section of the book.

The Downside:

Online at Hero Games there is a much more extensive Index of the book, while it would have been nice to see included in the book itself I can see page restrictions on this already large volume preventing that. I highly recommend getting that extra index for game use.

Beyond that there isn't much I can say against the book. Nor is there anything missing from the book that stands out. Possibly a giant fold out map of the city, but that's just icing on the cake.

The Otherside:

If you need a major urban center for your games, Hudson City is it. Most of the book is presented completely without System information, making it easy to use almost completely without conversions as a setting for any modern campaign in an urban center. Even if the city is only partly the focus of the game, you don't get much more detailed than this.

The book is a hefty volume at a decent price. The reading can feel a bit daunting but unless your the GM setting up the game you don't really need to read through all of the details and text presented, and there's a lot of it to read. I thought is was an excellent resource on a city, much better than others I've seen in the past. Hero really did a good job bringing the tangled mass that is a metropolis together with this book.

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