Valdorian Age

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The Review:

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The Upside:

Valdorian Age is a Fantasy Hero setting for Sword&Sorcery style campaigns, low magic, declining societies, fearsome sorcerers, massive warriors, scantily clad women in peril, all the good stuff from Conan and similar stories. The default Starting Date of the setting puts everything at the brink of a long slow slide into oblivion, the great kingdoms of man destined to fade away. Another major premise of the setting is that the Gods were once present but have since faded away and left man to their own workings.

Chapter One - The City Of Elweir. The setting focuses on a single large city, rather than the world at large. We get a detailed picture of one of the worlds largest, richest, and most depraved cities. Elweir sits inland from the sea where two major rivers meet, splitting the city into three distinct portions, and eight neighborhoods. Before the city itself is described the chapter covers the culture of the city itself. Elweir is, for all intents and purposes, a good sized City-State. Starting with the History of the city from its beginnings as a series of huts on the river and covering major growth points in the history, up to the current times.

The Overview of Elweir covers the geography of the city, climate, calendar, currency, religion and daily life. Property is also covered, and how it's handled in the city, commoners of any level don't own land, the nobility owns all of it and makes their money from the rent, not taxes on the common man. The Rulership covers the Prince of the City, and the noble elite, called the Fifty Families. It is this group that owns the land in the city and grants leases for people to control it under their name. The Law and the Underworld, sometimes they seem one in the same, covers how the criminal aspects of the city are handled, from bribes to gangs. The detail presented in this part of the chapter could be used not just in Elweir but as a basis for any medieval cities structure.

The Neighborhoods describes each of the eight major sections of the city. The biggest distinction made of how to tell who is from which section is how they dress, and interesting cultural aspect that puts many different kinds of people into a single setting. Each neighborhood has enough of it's own personality and aspects that it is very close to a traditional Kingdom spanning campaign with different peoples. Elweir is far from a homogeneous city where all the people are very similar in attitude. Gibberish is the northern most neighborhood, and is where sea captains come up river from the ocean to trade in Elweir, it's called Gibberish because most of the people there don't actually speak the language common to the rest of Elweir. Along the larger River Serpentine is the neighborhood of Lowtown, which is on both sides of the river. Lowtown is called such for several reasons, first it's physically lower than much of the city, sitting on the river it floods first if the Serpentine ever overran

it's banks, a lot of the buildings stand on stilts in the mud. Uphill East is on the easter bank of the Serpentine, and is comparable to a white collar suburb, mostly clerks, officials and those that directly support those kinds of trades live here. Uphill west, on the western bank above Lowtown, is the manufacturing section of the city, most of the residents are some form of laborer, carpenters, blacksmiths, and the like. If goods are made in the city they most likely come from Uphill West. The Canals sits on a sinking piece of triangular land where the two rivers (Serpentine and Worm) meet, it's streets are underwater and the first floors of many buildings are water logged. Going west is The Worm River, which is surrounded by the neighborhood of Worm's Hole, this neighborhood is similar to the Valdorian Empire since most of the people and goods coming from upstream are from that empire to trade their goods in Elweir. Snake's Den goes east and straddles the Serpentine River on the souther end of the city, since the lands upstream from this neighborhood are mostly barbarian lands it's those types of people who are found in this area. On dry land between the two rivers before they merge is Gold's Reside, where the cities nobility live in their massive mansions surrounded by a high wall.

With all this detail going to the city enough information is provided to set an entire campaign in the cities walls. The separation of the neighborhoods into distinct subcultures assures that you can't get easily bored and that no two parts of the city look the same.

Chapter Two - The Known World. Having a big city to play in is good, but it helps to know what else is out there, what kinds of goods and people come to the city from foreign lands for whatever reasons. This chapter gives itself over to describing the world of Il-Revys. First the Valdorian Empire is described in some detail, where the setting gets its name from. Valdor rose to power a thousand years ago as a slave threw off the chains of an evil race and started a rebellion, forming the Empire from the ashes of their masters. Valdor spread until it occupied roughly half the southern continent in the setting, before falling into decadence and stagnation. The other half of the continent is almost completely given over to various Barbarian states, tribes and lands. A second continent to the north is the home of the worlds only other major power, the Empire of Abyzinia, ruled by sorcery. The two empires have a fundamental difference of opinion. Valdor is ruled by martial power and treats all people as free, Abyzinia is ruled by sorcery and built on the backs of slaves. They are both currently roughly at the same level of decadence and downward slide.

The world, while not central to the setting, it still presented as important and gives enough detail that any campaign wishing to venture out into the wilderness has the information to do so.

Chapter Three - Swordsmen And Sorcerers. This chapter details Character Creation, it focuses on two aspects, the more abundant swordsmen, thieves, and other assorted types, and the dangerous and mysterious Sorcerers, the only source of magic in the setting. The biggest aspect of this setting that sets it apart from other Hero Settings is that characters all start with 8s in their Characteristics, Valdorian Age is a world in decline, the Gods have left, the lands are untamed, kingdoms are falling and men are out to get other men more than any other threat. Ten Character Archetypes are presented that work well within the setting, each have some suggestions on motivations and Disadvantages that drive the Archetype. Additionally there are nine Package Deals that can be used for the basis of a Character in the game, each one takes roughly half the suggestions starting Character Points, leaving plenty of room for customization, and recommendations on which Package Deals from Fantasy Hero Genre Book are also made. Another unique aspect to the setting is how Skills are treated, they have Skill Roll Maxima, which work exactly like Characteristic Maxima only for Skills, further cementing the idea that people in this age just aren't as good as peoples from other ages or settings.

One thing that hasn't declined is peoples ability to kill other people in war, or simply with any handy

weapon. Fighting Tricks is a section that covers various Talents and Talent like builds that Fighters of various kinds can purchase to look impressive, or be more deadly in combat.

Sorcery is the last part of the chapter. Magic in the setting is very specific, it comes from one of four specific sources, Black Magic, Elemental Magic, Divine-Spirits (these used to serve the Gods along before they departed the world), and Necromancy. All four are built on the exact same principle, Sorcerers in Valdorian Age do not possess arcane power, they must summon creatures that perform tasks for them. At the heart of this concept is the idea of the Favor, magic in the setting rarely fails, what happens when a Sorcerer fails a Sorcery Skill Roll is that they incur Negative Favor, which the outsider of the Sorcerers persuasion will call in by having the Sorcerer perform some task, from trivial to life-threatening. All of this adds a very sinister aspect to magic in the setting, the Sorcerers aren't bending reality to their will, instead they are bargaining with their souls to achieve power. This section covers each of the four aspect of Sorcery in detail, complete with common spells, how to create more with the right feel and how Sorcerers interact with the world at large.

What this chapter shows is how the Hero System can be used to create a specific feel for a campaign setting by restricting or tightly controlling certain elements for the desired effect. All these elements blend well to create a solid and classic Low Fantasy setting.

Chapter Four - Gamemastering The Valdorian Age. The first part is seven full campaign ideas, each with three major plot seeds that can be used as the backdrop and basis for Campaigns. An enterprising GM could even interweave two or more into a complex long reaching plot. The GMs Vault goes into the rumors and facts presented in Chapters one and two and sheds light on the truth, as well as revealing a few things not covered in those chapters at all. It also goes into the reasoning behind the restrictions of Chapter Three and how to work with them, change them and use them to best effect.

Chapter Five - NPCs. As stated in Chapter Three the basis for magic in the setting is the Summoning of a spirit of some kind. The first part of this chapter provides the templates for those spirits to use either as the summoned spirit for a PC or as a spirit for an NPC Sorcerer. They're built as a Templated Format so a GM can easily create more along the same ideas should they want to.

Some quick stats are provided for several NPC types that are common in the city, City Guards, Sailors, and Thieves of various kinds, nine Minions are presented. And there are four Archnemsis NPCs a GM can use as the main adversary to a campaign, or at the very least an ongoing villain to bother the PCs occassionally. These four include a City Magistrate, a Thief, a Black Sorcerer, and a Sorcerer-Priest.

The Downside:

With the focus on the City Of Elweir not a lot of detail goes into some of the kingdoms and lands that make up the world. If you want to venture outside the city walls a little more work will need to be done to fully detail the outside world.

The Otherside:

For those wanting a sword and sorcery style Low Magic Fantasy game this is an excellent setting. It captures the feel of dangerous magic, the deeds of great swordsman, and the corruption gripping humanity and dragging it into the muck.

One excellent use of the book is that because it does focus on a single large city it's almost a City Sourcebook as much as a Sword And Sorcery Setting, you could easily take Elweir, change a few aspects and drop it whole clothe into the fantasy setting of your choice - if you own The Turakian Age for instance you could easily replace Aarn with Elweir. I like how the restrictions and controls placed

on the normally unlimited Hero System are used to fully capture the attitude of the setting as well.

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