

Tuala Morn

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

Tuala Morn is a Celtic Setting, but is not a historical setting. Instead it takes the feel of many of the legends, and stories of Celtic myth and history and creates a detailed setting.

Chapter 1 - The Chronicle Of The Tualans. The book opens with a rich and detailed history of the land of Tuala Morn, starting from before the Tualan's occupied the current land, their journey to it and the trials and tribulations then encountered once settling. It reads like a long bard's tale, or two. Each portion of history is well written and one can easily imagine an old bard, or warrior, telling some portion of it to a youth growing up and learning the history of their land and their ancestry.

Chapter 2 - King And Commoner, Tualan Society And Culture. Chapter two covers the society of Tuala Morn in both breadth and detail. It goes over the hierarchy that the society follows. How war is conducted, on both small scale and large scale as well as various kinds of conflicts the kingdoms and clans engage in. A brief note on some universal Tualan Law, and how grievances are settled. Common trade practices and how trade affects Tualan society. Which arts and crafts the Tualan's engage in and hold in high regard. The Gods and Religion of Tuala Morn and how they interact with men, covering both religions that exist in the land. The Tualan calendar which touches on when the major holiday's are and what is done to celebrate them. Lastly it covers Geasa and how it works in Tualan society.

The chapter does an excellent job of painting a picture of an entire society. The text is filled with interesting side notes, anecdotes and short bits of Tualan history and lore. The entire chapter is engaging, and doesn't read like a rather dry series of notes like many other setting supplements I've read in the past. One thing I do like and feel the need to point out is that there are no Game Mechanics in this chapter, leaving one to read about the culture and society without distraction. Which is helpful to Hero Gamers and Non-Hero gamers alike.

Chapter 3 - The Ten Kingdoms, The Realms Of Tuala Morn. This chapter covers the geography, local history, political standing and important people of Tuala Morn. It starts with an overview of the entire realm, and a section on how the land itself is magical. After that it covers the eleven main areas (the High Kings lands and the Ten Kingdoms) and briefly goes over the islands surrounding the lands. Each of the Kingdoms starts with a short history of the kingdom itself, and then covers the major land features and people within the realm.

The entire chapter is punctuated with stories that explain why certain clans war, or how certain land

features are seen or came to be. It does an excellent job of not only giving one the facts (this Kingdom's boundaries are here, this area is control by this Duke. . .) but explaining them through history and story. It very much keeps the feel started with the first two chapters, creating a rich tapestry of the setting and how it's various parts all interact. Again, with no game mechanics to get in the way at all you get nothing but a detailed setting with interesting people and events. The maps drawn in this chapter are well done and easy to read, giving immense detail without becoming too cluttered.

Chapter 4 - The Board Of Notables, Characters. This chapter covers the various aspects of character creation for the setting. It starts out with a discussion on the type of game being run, and the feel of the setting. This is a Low Fantasy setting with some specific cultural and societal guidelines on how different professions and people interact. It strongly suggests not altering the Package Deals presented, which is a good thing - to get a specific setting feel one should put guidelines down.

First we get the Racial Package Deals, the available races in Tuala Morn are all human, but there are two human variants and two half-human variants (Fae-blooded and Troll-blooded). All four are well balanced, the two human variants cover mostly the vastly different cultures and attitudes, and languages. The Fae-blooded and Troll-blooded contain some special traits of having the magical blood of these creatures running in your veins. Second are the Professional Package Deals covering the following professions and how they are uniquely seen in Tuala Morn: Barbarian, Bard, Cataran (outlaw), Druid (and five subtypes), Hunter, Knight, Noble, Priest Of The Golden Temple, Smith, Spearman (the highest warrior class of the Tualans), Warrior, and Wizard (with three subtypes). The setup here is that Tualan society is very well defined and classes, certain professions come with social obligations and limitations, as well as traits that only they can learn (for instance Smithing is a type of Magic in the setting, only a Smith can learn those skills), and thus it does create a form of class-based game within the setting. The Professional packages cover the possible motivations of each one, and other character creation notes such as possible Disadvantages, advancement, equipment, and the like. Everything you'd expect from a chapter on Character Creation. All the packages are interesting enough that they aren't merely flavors of the same thing, they do a good job of creating unique and interesting professions that are constantly referred to in the previous three chapters.

Next comes a discussion of the other aspects of the Hero System and how they work and interact within the setting. Starting with Skills we are provided with an Everyman Skill List, a familiar thing for Hero Gamers. And the chapter touches on how some skills work specifically within the setting. Three KS specific to Tuala Morn, the six languages and how they are related and a Martial Art specific to the Tualan Spearman, setting them further apart from your basic warrior. Perks and Talents are covered next, giving specifics of how some of them (such as Social Rank) work in the setting. We are introduced to one new Perk: Faerie Favor, which is a favorable relationship with the Fae and a flavorful addition to the setting. The Magic Perk is covered in detail in Chapter Five.

The next part of the chapter covers three aspects of the setting that really make it stand out. Beneficial Geasa, usually some ability that determines when and how the character can die. Feats which are unique talents of the Spearman profession (and only they can buy them). Feats are divided into two kinds - Heroic and Superheroic depending on what style of game is being played (the GMs chapter covers the two styles in detail). and Gifts which are mostly flavor for a Character to make them stand out in Tualan Society. Both the Feats and Gifts are fun and interesting.

The final part of the Chapter covers Character Disadvantages, with a good discussion on Harmful Geasa and how they work within the setting and system. There is also an Equipment List, with prices, for the characters to reference. The last page of the chapter is Tualan Names, with most of the page dedicated to male names, female names are in the sidebar.

The chapter is pretty strait forward, covering Character Creation and how to have your characters fit the feel and theme of the Tuala Morn setting. It does a good solid job if you follow the guidelines, ignore them and you may be in danger of playing in yet another bland fantasy setting. Tuala Morn really has a rich and vivid style that can be a lot of fun if played up.

Chapter 5 - Tualan Magic. Magic in the setting is divided into three major types: Druid, Priest, and Smith magic. Only someone of the corresponding profession can learn the proper Magic. Druid Magic (Draicht) actually has three different kinds: Druid, Wizard and Witch, though the spells are the same for all three the Ranks (power level) are different. Priest spells are called Miracles, and Smith Craft has no special name but is the only way to create enchanted items in the setting. The Draicht are further divided into one of four kinds, corresponding to the seasons, adding even more detail and flavor to the system.

Most of the chapter is dedicated to Draichta spells (Druid/Wizard/Witch). The names and descriptions go a long way to make the spells feel part of the setting. Some of the spells are dedicated as Superheroic and only appropriate for that style of Tualan Campaign. The Priest Miracles, are covered next. There are few of them but they convey the nature of the Priest in the setting very well. Smith magic is covered next, they are the only profession that can create magical items, fitting the settings Low Magic Fantasy tone. The very last section of the chapter is a collection of unique and fantastic magic items that exist in the land.

The magic system used in the setting provides another solid example of how to use the Hero System to create a balanced and interesting magic system.

Chapter 6 - The Tualan Bestiary. The first part of the chapter covers the Fae in a very general sense, giving history, customs and information on various Fae myths from the real world. The rest of the chapter is dedicated to write-ups of various kinds of Faerie folk. There are some nice touches here that set this apart from a simply collection of monster write-ups. First, each one comes with the country of origin (Real World, not Tualan), alternate names the creature is known by in various places, and details on differing versions of the myth (such as the differences between a Scottish and Irish version of a similar creature). This allows you, if you need, to use the creatures outside the Tualan setting as fairies, or even in a more historical setting of Ireland. A few creatures are specific to Tuala Morn - namely the Dwarf, Troll and Giant. The last part of the chapter contains some NPC write-ups for use as adversaries against your PCs; a typical Cataran, Knight Of The Golden Temple, Pictoi Warrior (evil inhabitants of Tuala Morn that forever harry the Tualans), Vulkring Raider, and a Witch.

Chapter 7 - Beyond Tualan Shores. This short chapter covers the foreign lands that surround Tuala Morn and occasionally interact with it. Logres, the origin of the Priests Of The Golden Temple, the only other religion in Tuala Morn though minor compared to the Druids. Beyond that is Aquitaine, Kelmark, Vulkringland, and several others. This chapter paints a picture of a mythical Europe, drawing on many parallels but still creates a unique and interesting world. The similarities to our own world are a boon in helping Gamers get a better grasp of various cultures - but they are superficial at best and this should be kept in mind when gaming Tuala Morn. The setting is intended to take place inside Tuala Morn so this chapter is both short and without much detail.

Chapter 8 - The Bard's Portion, Gamemastering Tuala Morn. This is the GMs chapter. The first part covers setting up the style of the campaign, either Heroic or Superheroic, mimicking the truly fantastic feats of myth. It also provides seven ideas with which to focus a campaign on. The next part is the GM's Vault, which provides the truth behind some of the many rumors scattered through the rest of the text. In addition to those twenty-six plot seeds are provided, which can become single adventures or short story arcs in themselves. The chapter also has a write-up for the war chariot occasionally used by the Tualans.

The book ends with a translation dictionary of the Tualan tongue, providing both a Tualan to English and English to Tualan section. As well as a Bibliography containing both historical references and fictional references.

Tuala Morn provides us with a rich, detailed and exciting Celtic Myth setting to play in. Covering not just the land and society but the whole book is peppered with stories, tales and pieces of history. These elements really bring the setting into shape and make it more than a backdrop on which the Players run around. The setting book creates such a vivid picture the Players will want to interact with all aspects of Tuala Morn - especially the Fae which are literally everywhere. The Magic system presented is well balanced against non-magic using characters, and is presented in such a way as to be rare a well.

On top of that the art work and layout of the book itself reinforce this feeling, this is one of the few Hero books where the art work was more than pictures - it helped form the feeling of the setting.

The Downside:

There isn't a lot in the book that's an actual negative. If anything it would have been nice to get a little more on the culture of the Logres with whom the Tualan's have the most contact through trade and the Priests and Knights. But that would have distracted from the main focus of the book.

Chapter Eight I felt could have gone a little more into capturing the different feelings of a Heroic vs Superheroic campaign style. How to capture the feelings of wonder and within the Superheroic scope. Or possibly a little more on how to run a political campaign vs an adventuring one.

The Otherside:

How does this book do for Non-Hero System gamers? Excellent. The first three chapters alone are completely systemless, which is where most of the setting is presented. The Character and Magic chapters would require a bit of work to get the feeling into another system, but is easily doable.

Is the book worth the price tag? More than. A rich and detailed setting, interesting histories and people, faeries, it's got everything you could want out of a Celtic Myth theme. This is easily my favorite setting book presented by Hero Games so far, and quite possibly the best written and most engaging books released.

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