

Hero System Bestiary

Book Line:	Hero System	SKU:	102
Book Type:	Creatures, Beasts	Formats:	Softcover
Author:	Steven S. Long	Released:	July, 2002
Cost:	24.99\$	ISBN:	1-58366-002-X
Page Count:	239	Hero Designer:	Yes (SKU: 701)
Common Abbreviations:	HSB	Print Status:	In Print

The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

The Hero System Bestiary is a large collection of creatures, beasts and animals. However it really could be renamed The Ultimate Creature as it is much more than just write-ups. It provides extensive notes on creating creatures using the Hero System.

Chapter One - Creatures In The Game. Chapter one focuses on using the Hero System to create animals and using them in your game. Opening with a discussion on the nature of creatures and beasts, the main focus of the book is on non-sentient beings. And also goes over the role of creatures in your game from background flavor to the main focus, and everything in between.

The meat of the chapter is on Creature Creation, starting with using characteristics for creatures. Since creatures tend to interact in a fundamentally different way than NPCs in a game the characteristics section goes over how each one affects or is used by creatures. Particularly useful is a note on Negative Characteristics, since Negative STR is common amongst small animals.

The Skills portion covers the idea of Everycreature Skills, with an example list. The Skills section goes over how a creature would use a skill or how a Character interacting with a creature would use the skill - whichever is more pertinent. Of note are extended discussions on Animal Handler, Riding, and Languages. Also, Martial Arts is covered and provides an Animal Art called Red In Tooth And Claw for particularly ferocious or well trained predators.

Perks, Talents, Powers, Advantages, and Limitations covers how some of these elements are used by creatures. Disadvantages gets the most space as there are a number specific to creatures. Physical Limitation goes over Disadvantages particular to animals: Cold-Blooded, Limited Intellect, Poor Senses, Reduced Leap (for very strong creatures that can't jump), Reduced Manipulation, and Size/Weight. The Psychological Disadvantages most appropriate to creatures are also gone over, specifically Timid and Domesticated.

Creature Templates provides a good number of Templates, not unlike Package Deals, that can be applied to any creature to create a hybrid creature. Templates provided and discusses are Cybernetic, Magic, Mutations (these first three being more open ended ideas than templates), Aquatic, Battle-Trained, Camouflage, Diseased (with write-ups of rabies and the plague), Divine, Elemental (air, earth, fire, water), Extra Heads (an alternative to the standard Duplication method), Familiar (appropriate for fantasy games), Ferocious, Infernal, Size (from insectile up to colossal), Smart (or Cunning), Space, Spikes, Undead, Venom (with seven levels of toxins venom write-ups for various levels of lethality),

Winged, and Winter (or Arctic).

Creatures In Combat has two important parts. First is a discussion on how and when creatures will use various Combat Maneuvers, and which combat maneuvers are inappropriate for creatures with the Limited Intellect Disadvantage (and which levels of that Disadvantage cause creatures to forgo the use of Maneuvers completely). The other half is a discussion on Hit Locations. Not only are a wide variety of Hit Locations provided for various kinds of animals, but a solid discussion on how to create your own Hit Location Tables is provided. This section of the book is an excellent resource for GMs looking to add fantastic or simply weird creatures to their games and want some guidelines on what goes into a Hit Location Chart. Eleven new Hit Location Tables are provided for many animal types - and some animals throughout the book have their own Hit Location Charts just for them.

The last bit in the chapter is Other Considerations. This also has two elements. First is Population levels, with a very rough guideline on how to determine just how many of a creature live in an area, and a discussion on what it takes to sustain an animal population. The other part covers the value of animals when sold and the value of various animals parts - such as the skin of a dragon, horn of a rhino, or trying to trade your horse in for cash. The guidelines for determining how much a potential animal (or animal part) is are decent, but should be taken as a starting point.

Chapter one is probably one of the most useful and informative discussions on animals and creatures in general in any gaming system. With guidelines on creating, using and interacting with animals as well as including them into the tapestry of your game. Even if you don't need the rest of the books write-ups this chapter is worth the purchase.

Chapter Two - Fantastic Beasts. This chapter covers the fantastical beasts most often encountered in a Fantasy setting. If you're going to run a Fantasy Hero game this part of the book will help you out immensely.

Fully eighty-one creatures are detailed, plus options to alter many of them into variants, provides around one hundred fantasy beasts suitable for a Fantasy Hero game - or any place you want to include mythical beasts.

A number of "Giant" creatures are detailed - apes, bats, crab, insects (four varieties), lizard, rat, snake, wolf, and worm. These are good for a number of scenarios, including modern Horror games, anything with mad scientists and the like.

There are several entries that are broad categories with several entries under them. Demons has twelve infernal creatures to use in your games. Dragons has a Lesser and Greater version as well as a Wyrm and Wyvern. Elementals covers the four classic elements. Golems covers five types, clay, flesh, stone, metal, and wood. The Undead section covers eight types of undead to haunt your games with.

The coolest entry goes to the Jackalope however.

Chapter Three - Mundane Beasts. This chapter covers everyday (and some not so everyday) ordinary animals. These are all creatures that exist or existed in Real Life. Well over eighty animals are presented here.

Included in this section are eight Dinosaurs for use in Lost World campaigns (or anything else that needs dinosaurs). Eight varieties of horses. Different Great Cats, various dogs. Everything from snakes (twenty five kinds), to dogs and cats, several kinds of fish and other ocean dwellers (Dolphin, sharks, and whales to name a few), and birds (both birds of prey, a song bird, and others).

If you need a normal animal for an adventure chances are you can either find it written up or easily

adapt a write-up to your specific needs. Many Pulp Adventures use normal creatures as adversaries to be overcome, pits of hungry crocodiles, great cats to hunt (or outrun), and the like. Even modern games use creatures, like snakes or scorpions, to foil the heroes.

Normal creatures are often overlooked in gaming situations where players want to encounter the fantastic. But for those looking for a touch of the mundane, this has what you need.

Chapter Four - Beasts Of Science Fiction And The Movies. This section is twenty-two creatures taken from popular movies, science fiction and the like.

Listing them all is beyond the scope of the review. But I will touch on some prominent entries. The Giant Ape is a King-Kong style creature, there are also Giant Space Amoeba, Giant Dinosaur (think Godzilla), and Giant Carnivorous Plant to toss into your games (from Space Opera to Pulp Hero). The Chromedog and Living Brain are good additions to a Cyber Hero game. There are a number of entries that can be used in the Terran Empire Setting (or similar Space Opera game); Three robots, two Xenovore creatures, a Mon'da Hunting Lizard, and Neuroparasite. The Psychovore is good for any campaign featuring Psionics, or a Fantasy Hero game. The Slasher, a tribute to those unstoppable screen horrors that have been killing teenagers since we invented the horror movie genre. And we also have the Engine Of Destruction, the massive doomsday machine unleashed on galaxies to break them down to their component atoms.

The chapter covers the range of movie and science-fiction creatures quite nicely. If you were ever wondering how to write something up in Hero after watching a movie this section could go a long way to helping.

The bibliography gives you the resources to go find even more creatures to write-up if the book doesn't have enough for you.

The Appendix, in case you thought we were done seeing write-ups, has fourteen more creatures in it. These added creatures are a gaming aid, they go to show how you can apply the Creature Templates from Chapter One to creatures from the other chapters. With Magic Raven, Infernal T-Rex, Five Headed Manticore and Space Roc as just a few examples of what's here. All the Hit Location Charts from the book are gathered into one spot as well, including the individual ones from creatures in other chapters. A series of Hex Templates for Area Of Effect and some Creature Foot Prints, a Hex Template for a Lesser Dragon for example. And the last bit is a creature summary table for everything in the book so you can find what you need easily and quickly.

The Downside:

Not enough creatures? OK, not really. The book almost two hundred write-ups in it, not counting the Optional Alternates presented.

The only thing I might have liked to see are some more creatures in Chapter Four. Some truly strange things from the mind of the writer.

The Otherside:

Aside from ideas for what creatures to introduce, there isn't much for the non-Hero Gamer in this book. Unless you're into converting and want a starting place for a large number of creatures for your game, then I'd suggest picking this up.

For Hero Gamers, I would have to say this should go on your Essential Gaming Book list, especially if you play Fantasy Hero, Pulp Hero or anything that deals with the wilderness. The write-ups

themselves are useable as is, and Hero being Hero easily alterable to your taste.

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