

Fantasy Hero

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

Fantasy Hero is a genre book for setting up and running Fantasy games, from low to high and all styles in between. It is a very thick and comprehensive book on the topic, leaving no stone unturned.

Chapter One - The Fantasy Genre. Starting with the all important question, What Is Fantasy this chapter covers the major subgenres and metagenres. Subgenres includes the common styles of Fantasy Gaming, each one describes the genres main elements and provides some suggestions in Hero terms for setting up Characters. The Genre Elements are all helpful advice on the common details that set each subgenre apart and give them their flavor. Fantasy And Other Genres looks at using metagenres of Comedy, Horror, Mystery, Romance, and Tragedy. It also looks at using Fantasy Elements in other major Genres, Superhero, Dark Champions (modern action), Ninja, Sci-Fi, and Western genres all are discussed. Fantasy Elements covers things common to almost all Fantasy styles, including Alchemists, Castles and Keeps, Dungeons, Cities, Dragons and Monsters, Gods, Taverns and many more. A total of twenty-one elements that just about any Fantasy game has are examined.

The chapter is an excellent resource for those new to the genre, or those who are looking to introduce a different style of genre to their games. Even if you're an old hat at Fantasy Gaming you could find some tidbit in here to utilize in your games.

Chapter Two - Character Creation. Starting with an outline of the Character it discusses three elements that help create a Character, Background, Theme and Goals And Motivations. Each of these three elements apply to any type of Character and can help both breathe life into the Character and define some Campaign elements.

The next four parts are Package Deals, groupings of Characteristics, Skills and other Abilities that define either Race, Culture, Ancestry, and Profession. Racial Package Deals covers the most common Fantasy Races, looks at the common perceptions of them and provides a base Package Deal. It's important to note all of the Races presented are done so generically, while they can be used as is for most games they're best used as a starting point. Eighteen Races are looked at, with a bit at the end regarding sub-races and half-breeds. Cultural Package deals look at where the Character is from, while these are mostly dependent on your Campaigns geography and people there are a few that can

be applied universally, city, criminal, nomad, seafaring, trader, and warrior cultures. Again, these are best as starting points for more specific Cultures to your Campaign - for instance the Nomad Culture can be used for the basis of several unique cultures with a few additional aspects.

Environmental/Ancestry Packages are a kind of combination Racial/Cultural aspect, these include things like Divine or Infernal Ancestry, Deep Cultures (such as Deep Dwarves who never see the surface), Size and Weight (from tiny to large), and several more. The last Package grouping is Professional Packages. The four main Archetypes of the Fantasy Genre are each looked at with several subtypes under each one: Priest, Rogue, Warriors, and Wizards. There are also a grouping of Miscellaneous Packages that contain Craftsman, Mariner, Merchant and Noble. These last four can be used as NPCs, or as a different approach to a start to a campaign as the beginning point for a group of PCs before they move up to the more traditional roles. With all these Packages you have the ground work for all the traditional Fantasy Character tropes on hand, a little bit of customization can be done to fit them perfectly into your own campaign.

Characteristics looks at how the Hero System Characteristics affect a Fantasy Game. A discussion on Varying Characteristic Maxima and Characteristic Ranges, since Heroic Level games have a narrow range for Characters to choose from they provide some ideas on how to get some variance amongst the Characters. And the addition of an Optional Characteristic called Arcane Defense, a defense specifically defined to protect against any kind of magical effect, which are common in many kinds of Fantasy Games is introduced. Skills, Perquisites, Talents look at the most common elements to Heroic Level characters in the Hero System. The Skills discusses appropriate skills to Fantasy games, renaming several to a more Fantasy flavor, and introduces the Armorsmith skill. There are over a dozen new Talents are introduced that have particular applicability in a Fantasy Hero game, Beat Speech and Rapid Archery being two examples. Powers, and Power Modifiers, looks at how various Powers can be adapted to Fantasy Magic or Enchanted Items, as well as fantastic abilities. Disadvantages looks at common sources of disadvantages as well as providing suggestions for Character Disadvantages. All the suggestions here go a long way to gearing the generic Hero System towards a Fantasy Hero flavor. The last part of the chapter is a list of Fantasy Equipment with an example pricing system to use as a starting point.

Chapter Three - Combat And Adventuring. This takes a look at Hero System Combat, focusing on which aspects are most appropriate for Fantasy style combat and genre and which aren't. Three new maneuvers are introduced, Set Versus Charge, Shield Wall, and Unhorse. Optional Combat Rules looks at some new ideas for handling ideas like Ground fighting, Ignoring Opponents, Interposing, and Twisting The Blade. Hero System is a cinematic style system, thus killing opponents is harder than knocking them out, there is a section discussing this since Fantasy games rarely have battlefields of unconscious foes at the end of the day.

Weapons covers kinds of weapons, including hand-to-hand, thrown and poisons. Making Weapons looks at the many Hero System mechanics behind creating weapons and balancing them in gameplay. It provides both basic guidelines and advanced guidelines for more detail on creating weapons in the Hero System, giving many examples of how to treat various aspects. Armor takes a look at defending yourself from the weapons and provides many of the same design concepts from the damage prevention side of the fence. While both sections focus on Fantasy Hero it is an excellent look at balancing offense and defense in a Hero System campaign.

Fantasy Hero Mass Combat is a section of new rules for dealing with large numbers of troops on a battlefield. It looks at terrain, battle scale (in Hero System Inches), creating Units, Unit Movement, and Unit Combat. It also looks at Moral for a unit, how to treat Noteworthy Characters, Sieges, and some ideas for Magic in mass combat. All of these rules, with variations suggested, as excellent additions to the Hero System and invaluable to anyone looking to run large scale battles.

Chapter Four - Magic. One of the more difficult things in the Hero System is to take the generic Rules and create a unique, consistent and well flavored system of magic, a common staple in the Fantasy genre. The chapter goes through and provides all the aspects to help define magic in the game, in both generic and Hero System terms. Starting with the source, power level of both magic in the campaign and of spells and spell casters, and providing a number of ways to create and name ranking systems. Types of magic looks are the concepts of Arcane versus Divine; Combat (or Fast), Battle (for large scale warfare), and Ritual; Spontaneous versus Formulaic; Schools or Arcana of magic division, or classification by purpose; Psionics as Magic. Users Of Magic and Learning Magic go hand in hand focusing on who can cast magic and how they learn to do so. Methods of casting is probably one of the most important sections to help capture how magic feels in a campaign setting, it focuses on various ways to control when and how magic can be used. Social Issues looks at the various ways magic and its practitioners can be viewed in society, looking at organizations, commonalty and its effect on such things as politics, warfare, and the everyday. Rules Issues start to go into specifics of using the Hero System to create all the decisions made in the first part of the chapter. Purchasing spells with Character Points, varying cost, using them, power advancement, balancing them against each other and other elements of the campaign, and like considerations.

Spell Creation And Use focuses completely on using Hero System Rules to create a working magic system. Spell Effect, Casting Methods, Casting Time, Duration (and introducing the idea of a Lingering Advantage for Instant Powers), Target and Area Affected, and Range all are looked into. Providing multiple options, mixing options and blending them with the flavor of the campaign.

Example Magic Systems is twelve different methods of creating a consistent magic system using the concepts and rules presented in this chapter. From opened ended and nearly unrestricted to very restricted styles. Each style has a description, how the rules are implemented and comes with a few sample spells. In the sample spells every Magic System has a "lightning bolt" spell written up so you can easily compare the same special effect as each style treats it. With these you can either use them in your own games, or use them as an example to build your own ideas against.

Enchanted Items looks at how to introduce magic items to the campaign, the commonalty of them and several suggestions on rules for creating them. It then goes into several examples of Potions, Scrolls, Rings, Weapons, Wands and a few Miscellaneous ones with examples of how they might be built. While the examples are nice, the ideas for how to create and introduce them into a game are invaluable.

Chapter Five - Fantasy Worlds And Races. Fantasy Worlds looks into creating the physical world itself, taking into consideration land masses, climates, geography, ecology and how magic can effect them. It also covers celestial bodies and how they work, and finally population demographics. Fantasy Races looks at creating races and cultures in the setting, creating diversity, balancing races (especially those intended for Players), language and writing, and the philosophy behind creating racial Package Deals using the Hero System. Fantasy Civilizations is the most extensive part of the chapter. It looks into creating Histories, Culture (Arts, Family, Social Classes), Economics (including setting up income levels and pricing things), Government And Politics, Religions and Gods, Technology, and Travel. Using all the information in this chapter you can set up an extensive and consistent Fantasy World to adventure in, from a small kingdom to the entire planet.

Chapter Six - Gamemastering Fantasy Hero. Once you've created the world and its inhabitants you need to them create the campaign framework. Character guidelines looks at power levels, how the characters relate to the world, and similar considerations. Campaign tone looks at morality, realism and general outlook. Campaign theme provides some overall frameworks, looks at how to run the sub genre introduced in Chapter One, and campaign or story subjects to base adventures off of, and finally looks at Settings. After that you need to get into Running The Game, which covers Adventure

Structure and how to create a Plot. Dealing With Disconnects looks at various problems that might arise in a Game situation and how to deal with them. And finally how to work Disadvantages into the story. The Fantasy Environment looks at the scenery that adventurers may encounter; creating Fear And Awe effects; Light (lanterns, torches, etc); Traps (including ten example traps); Underground environs; and Walls and Doors. Villains And NPCs looks at creating master villains, monsters (including treasure), and other NPCs.

Chapter Seven - Drudaryon's Legion. This chapter is sample NPCs, both good and bad. Five Heroes are written-up, using the rules for the Turakian Age Setting as a default, and are all starting level characters than you can use as an example, NPCs, or pre-generated characters. Villains has two adversaries, and write-ups for an Orc, Ogre, and Troll. Enough to get you started in a campaign.

As extensive as the book is it doesn't end there. A very comprehensive Bibliography follows Chapter Seven, with fiction, non-fiction, some movies, and other RPGs. The Appendix contains four fantasy buildings you can use, a castle, wizard's tower, inn, and temple.

The Downside:

About the only thing this book didn't provide were maps for the four buildings in the Appendix. And considering all the information packed into this tome that's a minor quibble at best.

The Otherside:

This is the most comprehensive and complete look at constructing a campaign for the Fantasy Genre I have encountered. Almost all the information is presented generically and not specific to the Hero System, making it an excellent addition to anyone's library if they're looking for more ideas on creating their own Fantasy campaign. This is the gold standard for Genre books and GM information.

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