

You Gotta Have Character

Book Line:	Hero System	SKU:	115
Book Type:	NPCs	Formats:	Softcover, PDF, Digital Hero
Author:	Jason Walters	Released:	July, 2006
Cost:	26.99\$	ISBN:	1-58366-094-1
Page Count:	125	Hero Designer:	No
Common Abbreviations:	YGHC	Print Status:	In Print

The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

You Gotta Have Character gives us twenty-three real people from real history. As opposed to all those real people from fake history or fake people from real history. From the introduction by Ken Hite the book takes a humorous look at history, and gives us the facts (mostly) on some of the oddest set of characters to live and breath.

Each person is given from four to seven pages, most of which goes over their history. The more documented or colorful the history, the longer is goes on for. Accompanying each description are notes, quotes and other interesting tidbits about the person or the time they existed in. Each entry also has a bibliography where the author obtain some, if not all, the information. And in the case of artists a list of their works (be it filmography, written books or discography). Even websites with good information are included.

The greatest gaming aspect of the book isn't just the historical characters, it's the "Campaign Use" section each comes with. Each person comes with suggestions on how to fit them, or their personality, into almost any genre of gaming imaginable. From Horror to Sci-Fi, Fantasy to Super heroic. It's all there, on top of that each person comes with three Plot Hooks suited to both their historical place and other genre's.

A complete list of historical figures presented: Josephine Baker, Pope Alexander VI, Lord Byron, Alvar Nunez Cabeza, Calamity Jane, Rector Harold Francis Davidson, Andrew Jackson Davis, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Arthur "Weegee" Fellig, Reverend George Hensley, Robert Hooke, El Santo, "Liver-Eating" Johnson, Robert Johnson, Colonel Alexander McClung, Sister Aimee Simple Mcpherson, Miyamoto Musashi, Mungo Park, William "Bill The Butcher" Poole, Pytheas, Jim Savage, Tomas De Torquemada, and Henri De Toulouse-Lautrec.

One of the nice touches is the book doesn't give just dry facts and a perfectly historically accurate portrayal. It goes into the legends these people created for themselves, or that came up around or after they passed. While some are historically accurate, some take a good dose of Legend into the write-ups. Such as Robert Johnson who was, as a person, rather ordinary. Instead of the pure facts (which can be found repeated in the liner notes of just about any CD release with his works), it goes into the legend that came out of both his music and the times. His deal with the devil at the crossroads and the subsequent idea that he didn't die, but has been fleeing the devil ever since. Or El Santo, whose story can't be told without going into the legend created around the most famous of the Luchadores as depicted in his fifty-two movies.

We don't just get Men Of Action either, live "Liver-Eating Johnson" (who waged a one man war with the Crow Nation), or Mungo Park (The Original explorer of Africa). We get histories more gentle and interesting people as well such as post-Impressionist paint Henri Toulouse-Lautrec and Pytheas (Greek explorer, scientist and trader).

The Downside:

The book is undeniably short. At 125 Pages it's one of Hero Games' shortest books, and the shortest of the "Enemies" (or Characters in this case) Books. We only get twenty-three people. While all gaming books leave me wanting more this is one of the few where I reached the end and went "Wait, that's it? No more? Aww come on!"

Hopefully the book proves popular enough that Hero decides to do more like it.

If you subscribe to the Hero Games' EZine "Digital Hero" then this book is nothing but hardcopy reprints of the column by the same name. Only it's not everyone whose been portrayed in the past articles, just a lot of them. However, since a lot of people aren't subscribers to the EZine, this book is nothing but new information.

The Otherside:

This book, of all the gaming books out there, has truly universal appeal. Ignoring the Hero System write-ups of the characters, the history and descriptions of these very real people can be used in any game, anywhere. Especially with the helpful tips on how to transplant anyone into other genres.

The book is absolutely solid and good, despite being short. No game can go wrong adding this to their library of NPCs to draw from. You just can't beat history for the phenomenal level of strangeness out there. No costumed superhero compares to the on stage antics of Josephine Baker, and no Fantasy Warrior can outdo the single minded tenacity of "Liver-Eating" Johnson. And no royalty, no matter how ambitious, can outdo Eleanor of Aquitaine who was queen of both France and England at various points in her life.

History is just that cool.

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Last update: **2007/03/26 08:25**

