

Asian Bestiary, Volume II

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The Review:

Reviewed By Gordon Feiner

The Upside:

Asian Bestiary 2 picks up where Volume 1 left off. Volume 2 contains write ups for Japan, the Phillipines, Burma, Korea, Malaysia, and Tibet. Japan is by far the largest section of this book, taking up about a third of it. It also contains, as Volume 1 did, numerous variants and notes on creatures it didn't have space to detail.

The format and information layout is much the same as in Volume 1, a complete description of the creatures ecology, name variations from region to region and small portions of the original myths and legends.

Not only does each creature come with a full Hero System write-up, but a complete description of their ecology plus various tidbits of the stories that these creatures originated in. If a creature's name varies from region to region they are also detailed in the write-up, along with any variations that myths and legends had for these monsters.

Another upside you don't often see, each Country contains a small section on the Religions within the country and how they have had an effect on the local legends and lore. Putting many creatures into some perspective for that region.

A short note on Japan: Many creatures of Japanese legend were taken, or co-opted from Chinese legend, and so many creatures encountered in Japanese folklore are actually written up in the China section of Volume 1. It is noted in the Japan section which creature in the first volume to reference. Some may consider this a downside, but to be fair the creatures are place in the country of origin.

The Downside:

As with the first book, The one notable thing missing from this book that exists in most Hero releases: there are no Plot Hooks in the book, small one or two paragraph suggestions on how to include any given element in your game. While many of the write ups have a suggestion or two, none are as extensive as the Plot Hooks given in many Hero Books. To be fair, this kind of thing isn't present in this type of book normally, but it would have been cool to have regardless.

The only real downside to Volume 2 that I have a nit to pick is that the bibliography is not included in this book as well. Also missing that is in the first book is an alphabetical listing of each country with a quick list of the creatures there in, and an alphabetical list of each creature with the country they are from. It would have been nice to have all three items in both books for reference, as is you need to

get Volume 1 for these items.

The Otherside:

This book is an excellent source of Asian folklore for any game, not just Hero. Conversions would naturally be required to get the creatures statted out in your preferred system. But even without converting the stats the write ups contain enough information to give any game an authentic Asian touch.

All in all, The Asian Bestiary is one of the best monster books I've seen for any system at any point in time. Thoroughly researched, well done and cleanly organized, any game library would be improved with this book.

For more Asian creatures see Volume 1.

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