

REAL AMERICAN HEROES

Heroes, villains, legends ... the folklore of America features all of this and more. In this volume you will find pirates and soldiers, lumberjacks and steel drivers, mountain men and lawmen, cowboys, Indians, inventors, and eccentrics. All of whom are just waiting to be included in your roleplaying game campaign! And don't let the time period fool you, just because these characters existed in the 18th and 19th Centuries, doesn't mean you can't use them in your pulp, superhero, fantasy, or even science fiction campaigns! After all, these characters are **Larger Than Life!**

Larger Than Life features 20 archetypes, ranging from Blackbeard the Pirate to the man who invented the 20th Century: Nikola Tesla. In addition, there are a total of 24 full character sheets, each with a detailed history and description of the character in question. But that's not all! You also get over 124 biographies of other people related to each archetype, as well as six famous ocean-going ships, famous outlaw gangs, Paul Bunyan's entire logging log, and innumerable other historical tidbits. Each archetype also comes with at least one template, allowing you to build your own version of that archetype. So what are you waiting for? Dive in and start discovering those tidbits of American history you never new existed. But watch your step, because after all, these characters are... **Larger Than Life!**



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LARGER THAN LIFE

American Tall Tales Adventures

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Introduction

Kenneth Hite wrote, “America’s gods, appropriately enough, are the gods of careers....” This sentence may strike some as strange, as one doesn’t normally think of America as a land of gods (as opposed to one God, but that’s a different matter), but it’s all in how you look at it. At one point there was a large body of myths and legends describing the exploits of figures who, in keeping with the nature of the American landscape, were of great size and even greater strength. They strode across the land like giants of old, making and shaping the world around them, taming it for the use of their fellow Americans.

Unlike the more cosmic entities of the Old World, these American gods didn’t symbolize such abstract concepts as the sky, life and death, love, war, or the sun and moon, but instead were working men and women who accomplished great deeds through use of their skill, wit, and brawn. They were often the epitome of a certain occupation, and thus were the very best at what they did, and were capable of doing it faster, longer, and better than anyone else. These mythical figures allowed the American worker to live vicariously through their exploits, to take pride in their occupation, and to brag about it to others. They were, for a time, gods.

The names of some of these individuals should be familiar to the average American, while others are less well known today. Some have become enshrined as part of the national folklore; others are more limited in their exposure and have descended into near obscurity. However, the one thing these characters all have in common is the nature of their exploits. They all star in larger-than-life stories, tall tales designed to amuse and entertain. Paul Bunyan didn’t just cut down trees; he felled whole swaths of forest with a single sweep of his ax. John Henry drove steel with a hammer in each hand, outperforming a steam-driven drilling machine in the process. Joe Magarac was a steelworker capable of squeezing rails out through his fingers with the ease of a man mashing a lump of clay. When Alfred Bulltop Stormalong went whaling, he threw back any catch under 100 feet as too small. Pecos Bill lassoed tornados and rode a cougar instead of a horse.

It is these same qualities that make these “gods” so suitable as a form of folk superhero, for there’s little difference between them and some of the original comic book superheroes. It is the aim of this book to present many of America’s folk heroes of old, as well as a number of historical figures, who through exploits both notable and notorious became legends in their own time, on a scale on par for their status. They are presented, to paraphrase Mark Twain, not as they were, but more, as they should have been.

What's In This Book?

Larger Than Life is divided into four sections, each representing a major era of American history. Within each section, you'll find a number of individuals who best represent an archetypal occupation or role common to the time period in question, presented in roughly chronological order. In turn, each archetype contains not only the core character sheet, but also a listing of additional representations of the archetype, each with its own short biography. A Template for creating a basic version of the archetype concludes each archetype's representation.

Section One, *The Colonial Era*, covers the period from 1700 to the early 1800s. The archetypes presented are the Pirate, the Continental Soldier, the Backwoodsman, the Riverman, and the Man of Nature.

Section Two, *The Tall-Tales Era*, covers pretty much the whole of the 19th Century, as well as the early 20th Century. The archetypes presented are the Blue-Water Sailor, the Occupation Hero (represented by Sod-Buster, Steel-Driver, and Steelworker), and the Tinslerjack.

