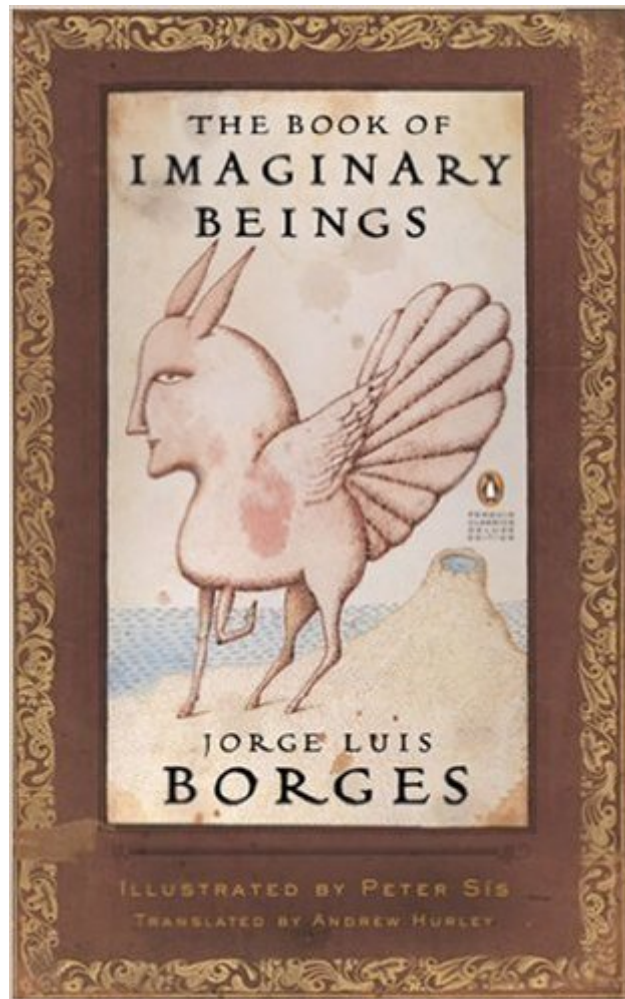


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The Book Of Imaginary Beings (Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition)



Synopsis

In a perfect pairing of talent, this volume blends twenty illustrations by Peter SÅ-s with Jorge Luis Borges's 1957 compilation of 116 "strange creatures conceived through time and space by the human imagination," from dragons and centaurs to Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat and the Morlocks of H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. A lavish feast of exotica brought vividly to life with art commissioned specifically for this volume, *The Book of Imaginary Beings* will delight readers of classic fantasy as well as Borges's many admirers. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics (September 26, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0143039938

ISBN-13: 978-0143039938

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 0.9 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (26 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #161,974 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #61 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > Caribbean & Latin American](#) #12899 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Literary](#) #14756 in [Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy](#)

Customer Reviews

Borges has compiled a zoology of the imagination under the title *The Book of Imaginary Beings*. He arranges these fantastical creatures from world literature alphabetically, but urges the reader to skip around, looking for subjects of interest. Some are familiar creatures: centaurs, nymphs, harpies, sirens, banshee, phoenix, hippogriffs, minotaur, mandrakes, and unicorns. Others I failed to recognize: A Bao A Qu, lamed wufniks, kujata, nagas, odradek, catoblepas, and others. Ctesias, physician to the Persian emperor Artaxerxes Mnemon, compiled a deficient description of distant India in the fourth century B.C., in which he mentions the crocotta, a blend of a dog and a wolf. The

Roman writer Pliny expands on this work by describing a cross between the hyena and antelope. Kafka tells about an unnamed creature, that is half cat and half lamb, not only in appearance, but also in behavior. C. S. Lewis describes chilling monsters in his fantasy fiction *Perelandra*. Dante paints a vivid, horrifying picture of Cerberus, a creature with clawed hands that rip the skin of the souls of the damned as they file past him. In *The Time Machine* H. G. Wells predicts the future split of mankind into the weak, aristocratic Eloi living on the surface, and the carnivorous Morlocks, a race of underground proletarians that feast on the Eloi. While I enjoyed perusing *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, this little collection is not among his best works. Perhaps, his structured approach, that of assembling accurate depictions of creatures from literature, unduly prevented Borges from freely exercising his own uniquely creative imagination. Nonetheless, the reader familiar with Borges will find this little book an interesting addition to a larger collection of his works.

In addition to being a brilliant and talented author, Jorge Luis Borges also had a strong interest in mythology, fantasy and philosophy. It shines through in this book, a field guide, of sorts, to the imagination. While it may not be amongst his best works, it IS a fun read, and one gets the feeling it was really a labor of love for Borges. Spanning the realms of folklore, mythology, theology and literature, this volume winds up being perhaps one of the closest modern equivalents to a medieval bestiary. While not quite like Carol Rose's 'Spirits, Fairies, Leprechauns and Goblins,' or Mack & Mack's 'Field Guide to Demons, Fairies, Fallen Angels and Other Subversive Spirits,' I thoroughly enjoyed reading through this little book. And, as Borges himself says in the introduction, this really is meant to be a book one flips through occasionally as any good volume of miscellanea. Lurking in the pages of this book, one finds such familiar beasts as dragons (of east and west), lamiae, harpies, the minotaur, satyrs, Valkyrie, manticores, golems, kami and the Lernaean hydra. Yet we also find more obscure and exotic things, like the Chinese ink monkey, Lamed Wufniks, creatures from American folklore (like the Hide-Behind and goofus bird) and a strange hairy beast seen in France. While werewolves and other shapeshifters were intentionally excluded, Borges also includes a great number of beasts from literature, ranging from the Behemoth of the Bible, Homer's scylla and the roc from the 1,001 Nights, to stranger things imagined by Poe, Kafka, H.G. Wells and C.S. Lewis. All in all we get well over a hundred beasts mentioned, each with a short story and description, and some with cute little cartoon illustrations. The end result is quite a fun read.

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