

Common Beasts, Friends and Foes by Francis Toole

***Abstract:** High Fantasy creatures may be familiar, but their origins may not be. This article discusses common high fantasy creatures, their characteristics and origins.*

High Fantasy books come with a wide range of characters and creatures. Included below is a list and description of popular creatures that you will likely see in the high fantasy world.

Elves

Elves have a long history in the high fantasy genre, including William Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night Dream* and JRR Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Elves have strong ties to Icelandic folklore and have often been associated with fairies, considering they are small and mischievous creatures. The contemporary depiction popularized by Tolkien has Scandinavian origins. These Elves are tall and wise creatures who are deceptively old. Elves may appear middle-aged in human years but can live to be hundreds of years old. Their most notable physical characteristic is their pointy ears. They are more intelligent and aware than humans and have magical powers and capabilities. (Radford, 2017)

Orcs

Orcs are another high fantasy creature made popular by the *Lord of the Ring Series*. Although, they were featured much earlier in the fantasy poem, *Beewolf*. Generally, Orcs are unpleasant creatures with low levels of intelligence. Although, they have large physical bodies and high levels of strength. They thrive in violent environments and are often involved in war and combat, which makes them primarily evil or sadistic creatures. (Orc—New World Encyclopedia, n.d.)

Fairies

Also known as the little people or the hidden people, fairies are small creatures with wings (Castelow, n.d.). Much like elves, fairies are often associated with nature and appear in scenes and settings in wooded areas (Britannica, n.d.). Fairies are neutral creatures that can be both an addition to the protagonist or protagonists in the story or, they can be an evil creature that gets in their way and tries to hurt or stop the quest (Carmody, n.d.). Fairies have been common throughout history, specifically, the Nymph creatures of Greek Mythology or the Jinni from Arabic Mythology (Castelow, n.d.). They are also popular in Irish and Scottish folklore (Britannica, n.d.).

Dragons

Dragons are another magical creature of high fantasy worlds. They are often the common association when thinking of fantasy creatures and stories. Dragons are large fire-breathing creatures. Therefore, they are often dangerous creatures that the hero of the story must defeat. This belief was likely spread during the beginnings of Christianity when these creatures were associated with Satan. Other religions and mythologies believed that Dragons could be both good and evil. (Radford, 2019)

Trolls

Trolls are large creatures and can be associated with Scandinavian folklore roots. These creatures are often made unpopular by their large stature and the general chaos that they cause. Trolls often hang around castles or the perimeter of civilization. They have also been known in stories to ask for challenging tasks or tolls from the hero. (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.)

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