

An A to Z of Dragonlore (*tenth instalment*)

SIREN, an alluring singing voice tempting sailors to their fate, often shown as a creature with the head and breasts of a beautiful woman on the body of a bird.
SIRRUSH, a kind of anti-griffin from Babylon of the 6th century BC, with the front legs of a lion, the back legs of an eagle, and a scaly body with a dragon-like head on a long neck.

SKOFFIN, an Icelandic creature similar to a basilisk.

SLEIPNIR, the eight-legged horse of Odin from Norse mythology, was swift as the wind but not winged.

SNARK, a creature whose hunting was poetically detailed by Lewis Carroll in 1876, who described all of its habits but said nothing about its appearance.

SPHINX, originally described by the ancient Greeks as a winged monster with a dog-like body and a woman's head and breasts, that in their legends waylaid travellers and asked them a riddle; if they could not answer correctly, it tore them to pieces or tossed them over a precipice. Eventually Oedipus got the answer right, and the Sphinx of Thebes herself leapt over the precipice to her destruction. The answer to the riddle, whatever the question, was always "Man," which may give a hint as to the meaning of the monster. Later the Greeks identified the Egyptian carved figures of recumbent man-headed lions as Sphinxes, and these are now the better known version. The huge Sphinx of Giza near the Pyramids, the only survivor from the Seven Wonders of the World, is universally recognised as a marvel.

SYLPH, the elemental spirit of the air in Paracelsus' system and possibly invented by him, they are of course invisible so nobody really knows what they look like, though they are often shown as a nymph or fairy.

TANIWHA, a fierce water-monster found in the Waikato river in New Zealand, as described in Maori mythology.

TARASQUE, a man-eating river monster of the Rhône, spawned by Leviathan.

TATZELWORM, a fierce reptilian monster with cat-like head and front legs that is said to live in holes in the Alps.

TENGU, a monstrous Japanese bird-man with a human body but clawed feet, huge wings and a long pointed beak and eyes that flash like lightning, it had a demonic nature and features widely in Japanese art.

THEOW, described by Pliny as a kind of wolf, the Tudor heralds took it from the bestiaries but gave it cloven hooves, a spotted body and other chimerical characteristics, though it was used but seldom.

TIAMAT, the archetypal Chaldean dragon, the mythical monster from whose body Heaven and Earth were formed by Marduk when he had slain it.

To be continued...

Pictured in 1993 by Ralph Brocklebank

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Arms of West Dorset District Council with Sea-Wyvern Crest and Supporters
drawn by John Ferguson (from *Basic Heraldry*, 1993)

The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

The world of heraldry has been showing renewed interest in all manner of monsters, and even inventing some new ones.

HERALDRY For the Local Historian and Genealogist by Stephen Friar (Alan Sutton, Stroud 1992) has some excellent drawings of heraldic beasts by Andrew Jamieson, some of which are reproduced opposite, while **Basic Heraldry** by Stephen Friar and John Ferguson (Herbert, London 1993), from which comes our cover illustration, has amongst the superb colour plates examples of heraldic Antelope, Cockatrice, Griffin, Pantheon, Pegasus and Unicorn and many others in black and white.

The Sea-Wyverns in the newly granted arms of the West Dorset District Council are an interesting new development combining the sea-side location and interests of the District with the historical connection of the ancient Wessex emblem of the Wyvern. It might be argued that the creatures drawn here are actually Sea-Dragons, as seen as supporters of the Carnarvonshire and Londonderry arms, whose rear legs are subsumed into the fish-tail leaving the front legs to hold the shield, whereas a Sea-Wyvern should also lose its rear legs into a fish-tail (its fore limbs being actually its wings) thus leaving it with nothing to hold the shield. In fact, the relationship between the Wyvern and the heraldic dragon as used in Wales is not entirely clear, and needs to be discussed in due course.

Another new book worth a look is **Heraldry** by Henry Bedingfield, Rouge Croix Pursuivant, and Peter Gwynn-Jones, Lancaster Herald (Leicester 1993), fully illustrated in colour with examples both old and new taken from the records of the College of Arms. It has a whole chapter, one of eight, on **Heraldic Monsters** by Gwynn-Jones which traces the use of monsters in heraldry from mediaeval times down to the present day. One notes the re-appearance in modern grants of some of the Tudor inventions such as the Alphyn, whilst in his chapter on **Fauna and Flora** there is a new hybrid, the Sea-Fox granted as a crest to a Building Society.

The beasts shown opposite, drawn by Andrew Jamieson, are:

1 Alphyn, 2 Sagittarius, 3 Cockatrice, 4 Martlet, 5 Male Griffin, 6 Griffin, 7 Dragon, 8 Phoenix, 9 Pegasus, 10 Panther, 11 Wyvern, 12 Pelican, 13 Salamander, 14 Yale, 15 Unicorn, 16 Tyger.

