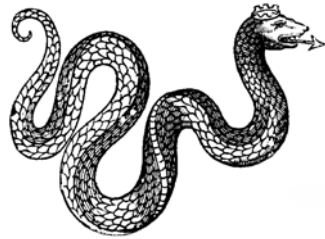


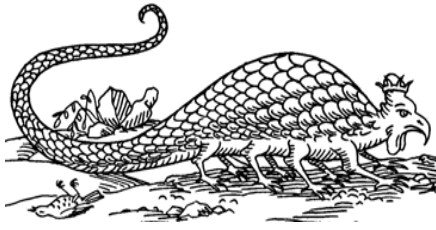
An Alphabet of Queries (3)

Basilisk and Cockatrice—are they the same? Opinions differ, as we shall see. The Basilisk started out as King of the Serpents, the name meaning “little king” in Greek, which of course had to be more venomous than any other. It was depicted as a snake with a crown-like crest on its head which it always held up off the ground (seen on the right, from an early Bestiary). In another version, from an old Dutch

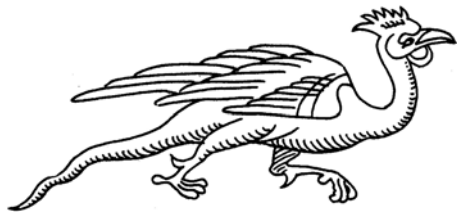


folk legend (kindly brought to our attention by Roger Seabury), the Basilisk of Utrecht is seen here looking into a mirror and thus killing himself with his own deadly gaze. He still keeps a largely serpentine form

though he has grown little legs like a lizard. The next example, from Aldrovandi's *Opera Omnia* (Bologna 1599), still basically a serpent but now with eight legs and a cock's head, is a bit of an aberration and has never been seen again. Note the little bird killed by its



deadly gaze. The question is, where did he get that head? Turning now to the Cockatrice it began life as the deformed creature found in that rarity of nature, the cock's egg; it had a scaly rather than a feathery body, a worm-like tail and misshapen wings not unlike those of a bat. None of these foetal forms



were known to survive, but superstition imparted evil characteristics to them, as creatures of the devil, and they emerged as composite creatures, as in this picture from a 12th century English bestiary.

From now on these two creatures converge until they become virtually indistinguishable, one a serpent with some cockerel features and the other a cockerel with some serpent features, with the balance varying from artist to artist.

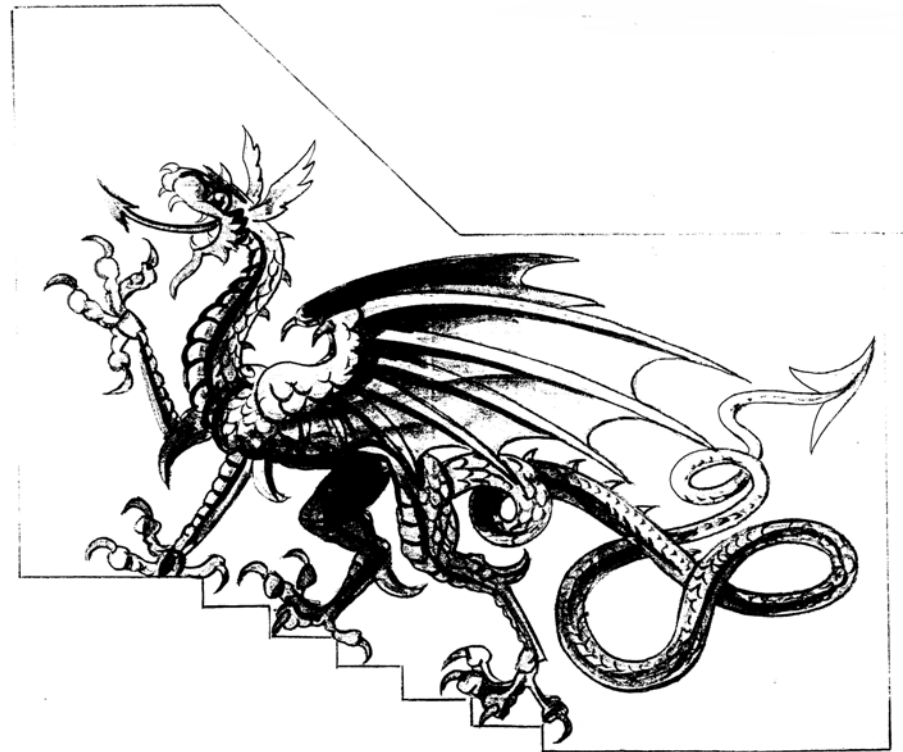
(To be continued)

Dragonlore

The Journal of The College of Dracology

Number 19

St Valentine's Day 2000



Dragon design by John Bainbridge
for a mural in the house of Mary Rose Rogers MBE

Piloted in 2000 by Ralph Brocklebank
Issued St Valentine's Day 2002 from Orland, Clent, Stourbridge, Worcs DY9 9QS

The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

John Bainbridge was one of our most gifted heraldic artists—he had done some work for me which included a badger, a wolf and a goat but no fabulous beasts unless you count a pair of Tritons—and he had produced a series of designs for decorating the staircase in the house of Mary Rose Rogers, who is evidently an enthusiastic dracologist. The series started with a traditional dragon (*see our cover*) and progressed through more intricate and convoluted creatures, but sadly John died before realizing the project. Note the tendency, even with heraldic artists, to make dragons more elongated and serpentine—compare, for instance, the official badge for Wales with the more recent design for that of the Prince of Wales, which stylistically looks very like John Bainbridge's work:-



Dragon Developments in Diverse Directions

The popular image of the Dragon has developed in two distinct ways recently. On the one hand, in the move to take away everything fierce or frightening from children, so that even the Big Bad Wolf has become a harmless figure of fun, the Dragon is presented as a bloated, useless and even friendly participant in children's games. He is shown with a bright green body, a swollen belly, vestigial wings that would certainly not get him off the ground, the spikes along his back often red or orange but cushioned into pneumatic lumps that could do no harm, and a quirky face with large pleading eyes, emitting puffs of smoke from his nostrils but no flames. Thus Puff the Magic Dragon is said to become a children's favourite on a TV programme, and other versions of what we may call Disneyfied Dragons abound. One less direful example that is enlivened by some stylish drawings is **Sir Nobonk and the terrible, awful, dreadful, naughty, nasty Dragon** by Spike Milligan with pictures by Carol Barker (Michael Joseph, London 1982) and another in a somewhat similar vein is **Sir Bertie and the Wyvern: a tale of heraldry** by Nicholas Wilde (Debrett, London 1982) which has a vaguely educational aura. More recently the Harry Potter books have become great favourites with plenty of fantastic beasts of which Norbert the Hungarian Horntail Dragon is a notable and loveable creation. On a recent visit to a Children's Bookshop I was amazed at the large number of works devoted to dragons, and quite a few to unicorns, all with a very high standard of imaginative artistry, though I did not have a chance to read them in order to judge the value of the texts.

On the other hand, and in quite another direction is the cult of Dungeons and Dragons, in the world known as Fantasy Fiction. Probably inspired by late 19th century German romantic paintings of the Teutonic hero Siegfried plunging his sword into the all-enveloping, writhing venomous serpentine dragon Fafnir, these Dragons are made to look as fierce as possible, of huge dimensions, with long coiling necks and tails, jagged claws, fearsome teeth, bloodshot eyes, sheets of flame spreading from their mouths and vast clawed bat-like wings that almost blot out the light of the sun. While the bold hero, often clothed in black leather and chains, may fight his monster with an enormous sword, the dragon is sometimes magically tamed and ridden by a beautiful blond princess, who has naturally to be won over and rescued. The fantasists, who often work in newly emerging media such as record-sleeves, video tapes and computer generated images, have gone far beyond exaggerating traditional dragons and have produced a truly amazing range of incredible monsters, often existing simply as unnamed horrors. One of the better known examples is the Triffid, invented by John Wyndham (who also wrote about the Kraken) and made quite convincing in the film of his book **The Day of the Triffid**. Perhaps not strictly a beast, it starts in the guise of a plant, but turns carnivorous and develops the power of locomotion and is finally defeated in the best classical tradition by the hero finding its one weakness. In **Forbidden Planet**, a film reworking the story of *The Tempest* in the mode of science fiction, a huge terrifying monster not unlike a Triceratops tries to materialise at the climax of the story, but it turns out to be the external embodiment of ones inner hates and fears that can only be overcome by calming ones soul through the power of love. This is not unlike the mediaeval view in which fearsome demons and dragons are seen as symbols of the evil within us which need to be defeated by the power of the Christ, Who is Love.

Another powerful presentation of a monster of horror was seen in the 1998 film **Deep Rising** which featured an enormous Hydra-like sea-creature which attacked a vast cruise ship and did not just eat people but drank them. Amid scenes of terrible destruction, the hero, heroine and a clown figure are the only ones from a large cast to escape as the monster meets its end. With a somewhat cynical ending this film revels in horror and any moral is hard to discern.

Like their classical antecedents, these tales usually carry a moral lesson, but one may regret that the powerful images created by the film makers have replaced the vivid imaginations evoked by the power of the word. Such films are of course widely watched by children, so one wonders whether it might not be better if they had first had a taste of horror from the Wicked Witch, the Big Bad Wolf and a traditional Dragon or two.

REVIEW

Scottish Heraldry: An Invitation written and illustrated by Mark Dennis (Heraldry Society of Scotland, 1999) is an enchanting handbook in which occur amongst a host of brilliantly original coloured pictures, images of the Unicorn (of course) and Panther, Martlet, Griffin, Dragon, Phoenix and Dolphin. It is delightful to see these creatures portrayed in such a fresh manner.