

Is the Iguana an indigenous Dragon in Indonesia and the Isthmus? Certainly some of its species are found in Fiji and Papua New Guinea, which may be extensions of Indonesia geographically if not politically, but they are mainly found in the Tropics of America, not just in the Isthmus but spreading both north and south. The only marine species lives on the Galapagos Islands, made familiar by those wonderful wild-life films shown so often on the television. In character they are generally placid and docile, except when frustrated at mating time, when they can become tetchy, biting and scratching. So they are quite unlike the so-called Komodo Dragon, a huge lizard dwelling on a single Indonesian island, which is notably fierce all the time. In fact, Iguanas were so tame that they were widely sold as pets when small and gentle, though there is now a spate of these fully-grown six-foot lizards looking lustily for mates, abandoned by their erstwhile keepers and now languishing in wild-life havens and herpetaria. So their character is not in the least dragon-like, and it would seem that Iguanas were totally unknown among those peoples where ancient dragonlore originated. It is possible that in recent years some features of their appearance, such as the long row of spines down the back and the spiny face and dewlap of some species of Iguana, may have influenced artists in their depiction of dragons in fantasy works, but I do not think we shall be adding the Iguana to our A to Z of Fabulous Beasts. Nice try, though!

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A winged heraldic Antelope in Baz Manning's crest, granted 2000.
A brush-drawing by Robert Parsons.

The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

Any heraldic artist has to be familiar with depicting monsters of all kinds, but not many have chosen to have one in their coat of arms. Baz Manning, an enthusiastic dracologist, wanted to have one with the word “heraldic” in its name, so the choice was between the Antelope and the Tyger, and the latter proved to be less visually attractive. To make it even more fabulous, and to reflect Baz’s love of flying, this Antelope has wings (*see cover*). Much of the artistic work that Baz has done has been in painting and renovating shields of arms for Lincoln’s Inn and for the House of Lords, and his own shield includes emblems from these two institutions, but it is his crest which interests us here. The heraldic Antelope is also known as the **Argasil**, but perhaps not when winged. This crest also carries allusions to Baz’s profession of heraldic painter, the blazon being: *Upon a Mount growing therefrom Giant Red Paintbrushes (Castilleja miniata) slipped and leaved proper an Heraldic Antelope statant erect per fess dancetty Gules and Purple armed tufted unguled and winged Or holding with the sinister forehoof and by a guige Tenny in the dexter forehoof an Escutcheon Argent*. This was granted in the year 2000, and the Agent was Robert Noel, Lancaster Herald, who, like Baz, is a keen dracologist.

Another crest with a fabulous beast is the *Wyvern wielding a Seax*, granted to John Dent of Norwich, who has written about heraldic monsters in the Journal of the Norfolk Heraldry Society. The choice of a traditional old British beast reflected John’s background, whilst the Seax is a reference to his Essex origins. It is an elegantly simple design, albeit unique, and carries all sorts of subtle overtones. His status as a dracologist is assured.



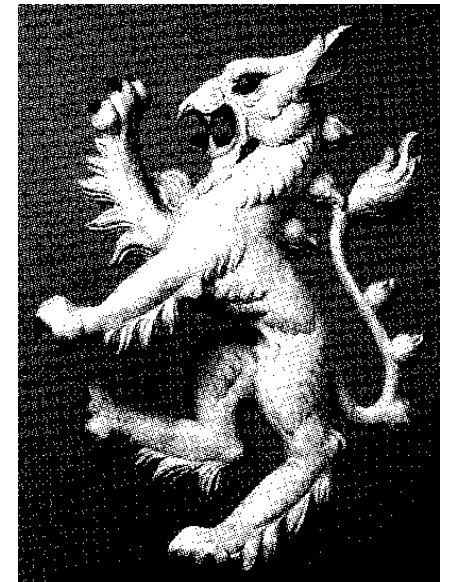
count as a beast may be questioned, but this one has acquired speech and locomotion, so may fairly be reckoned to have evolved into the animal kingdom. George suggests that, paired with a **Water-monster** from Namia, an Ent would make an innovative supporter for a novel coat of arms for some enterprising and fantasy-loving Canadian body. George also has a note about the **Balrog**, a fierce creature whose habits and attitudes are well described in Tolkien’s book, though little is said about its appearance (rather like the Snark in that respect), though for the film it had to be depicted, in the guise of a giant Minotaur as it turned out, with horns like a musk-ox, clawed hooves and a long swishy tail, evidently inspired by John Howe’s interpretation.

REVIEWS

The Complete Book of HERALDRY: An international history of heraldry and its contemporary uses by Stephen Slater (London 2002) is exactly what it says on the cover, with each topic given a two- or four-page spread, illustrated in colour throughout. One such topic deals with MONSTERS AND FABULOUS BEASTS and depicts a Panther incensed, a mediaeval Wyvern from a Garter stall-plate, a more up-to-date Wyvern, a Sagittary (Centaur), a Griffin, a Bonacon’s head, a Unicorn and a two-tailed Mermaid or Melusine (called Sirene in the French-inspired example given from the Gabon) in a well-informed text.

Crowns and Crests: Heraldry in the Round (no author named, no date given, but produced by the College of Arms in the Jubilee Year 2002 as a catalogue for an exhibition) illustrates forty-five wooden carvings that had adorned the stalls in St George’s Chapel, Windsor, of all those Knights of the Garter (and two Ladies) who died during the first fifty years of the Queen’s reign. There is an abundance of livestock (four lions, two boars, a bull, pelican, eagle, talbot’s head, peacock, stag’s head, cock, chamois, falcon, ostrich, goat’s head, badger and lamb) but only two fabulous creatures, a black Demi-Eagle with two heads (7th Earl of Radnor) and a rampant white Heraldic Tiger (4th Baron Harlech) balanced precariously on one foot, which alone makes it worth a visit to the exhibition.

(*See picture on right*).



Fabulous Beasts in Fantasy Fiction and Film

Since we touched on this theme in No 19, there have been some developments worth noting, including a couple of sumptuous books. **Fantasy of the 20th Century: an Illustrated History** by Randy Broecker (Portland, Oregon 2001) reproduces in all their original colours, pictures of dragons and other monsters along with sword-wielding heroes, voluptuous damsels, long-robed wizards and lost worlds, from a wealth of book jackets and illustrations, magazine covers and film posters, and has a witty and informative text. It is very good on pin-pointing innovations and following trends, and has many pithy comments both on style and on content. Dragons, Unicorns, Mermaids and the rest are very much taken for granted in all their variety, but there is one cover-picture by Frank Frazetta for a collection of stories by Clark Ashton Smith (1991) which shows a wizard confronting a Minotauric monster that may have inspired the depiction of Gandalf and the Balrog in the film of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. There are also some of Tolkien's own drawings of dragons for his book *The Hobbit*. This latter features in another superb book, **MYTH & MAGIC: The Art of John Howe** with a Foreword by Peter Jackson (London 2001) which not only shows the artwork that inspired the visual presentation of the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy (one part still to be shown), but traces much of his earlier work.. Dragons loom large, as do many other fantastic monsters, of which Smaug, the dragon from *The Hobbit*, is probably the best known. There are some wonderfully evocative wild landscapes with strange monsters weaving their way through them.

GUARDS! GUARDS! is a Discworld Novel by Terry Pratchett (London 1989) which features one large badly-behaved dragon summoned by wizardry and a number of small better-behaved dragons that have been bred as pets. The traditional hero fighting to rescue a lady is present, as is proper, amid those imaginative touches and unexpected twists that Pratchett is famous for. (The book was a present from Leslie Hodgson.)

Perhaps Anne McCaffrey's *Chronicles of Pern* deserve a mention; apart from **The White Dragon**, other titles include **Dragonflight**, **Dragonquest**, **Dragonsinger**, **Dragondrums** and **Dragonsong**. What more could a dracologist want? One should also mention **Dragonheart**, starring Dennis Quaid and Davis Thewlis with Sean Connery as the voice of Draco (Universal Films 1996). The computer-generated talking dragon was the real star in this mock-mediaeval sentimental concoction of a legend, but note how much larger dragons have grown (now as large as a whale) compared with their dog-sized mediaeval precursors.

Creatures from Tolkien and from C.S.Lewis's *Narnia* stories appear in Darren George's latest instalment of **The Mad Menagerie** (he having dealt with the **Melusine** in the previous edition). The **Ent** is an animated tree that comes to the aid of a pair of Hobbits in *The Lord of the Rings*. Whether a giant vegetable can

Fabulous Beast in the works of Rudyard Kipling

Kipling was regarded in his day as an outstanding poet, story-teller and patriot. Indeed, there was even a Royal Navy destroyer named after him, one that served in Mountbatten's flotilla. After his death, his reputation went into decline, perhaps because of his association with India and the Empire at a time when we were going through a phase of anti-imperialism. However, he is now being re-assessed very favourably. His poem "If" was voted our favourite English poem, his story-telling skills are again greatly admired, while a recent survey reckons him as one of the founding giants of the *genre* of Children's Literature. **The Jungle Books** and the **Just So Stories** remain enormously popular, and Kipling provides just what children need – plenty of information imaginatively presented, amusing word-play and delightful repetitions. He is particularly good writing about animals, and Konrad Lorenz, the pioneering ethologist (an expert on animal behaviour), has said that although we know that animals cannot talk, if they *could*, they would talk in exactly the manner that Kipling portrays.

I have searched the stories for fabulous beasts, and found only one, not a traditional monster, but one that Kipling made up. My zoology tutor told me that although it resembles no creature known to science, it exhibits all the characteristics an animal would need to live in that particular environment. He said that Kipling knew his animals so well that he could even invent a convincing new species.

On the next two pages we reproduce Kipling's own drawing of this creature, opposite the extended caption that he wrote to explain everything that was going on in the picture. Although the scene described is little more than an aside in the story of *The Butterfly that Stamped*, an episode in the life of King Solomon son of David, one of the **Just So Stories** (Macmillan, London 1902), it certainly intrigued me as a child, and this piece of imaginative fantasy is offered here as a suitable treat for Christmas.

THIS is the picture of the Animal that came out of the sea and ate up all the food that Suleiman-bin-Daoud had made ready for all the animals in all the world. He was really quite a nice Animal, and his Mummy was very fond of him and of his twenty-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine other brothers that lived at the bottom of the sea. You know that he was the smallest of them all, and so his name was Small Porgies. He ate up all those boxes and packets and bales and things that had been got ready for all the animals, without ever once taking off the lids or untying the strings, and it did not hurt him at all. The sticky-up masts behind the boxes of food belong to Suleiman-bin-Daoud's ships. They were busy bringing more food when Small Porgies came ashore. He did not eat the ships. They stopped unloading the foods and instantly sailed away to sea till Small Porgies had quite finished eating. You can see some of the ships beginning to sail away by Small Porgies' shoulder. I have not drawn Suleiman-bin-Daoud, but he is just outside the picture, very much astonished. The bundle hanging from the mast of the ship in the corner is really a package of wet dates for parrots to eat. I don't know the names of the ships. That is all there is in that picture.

