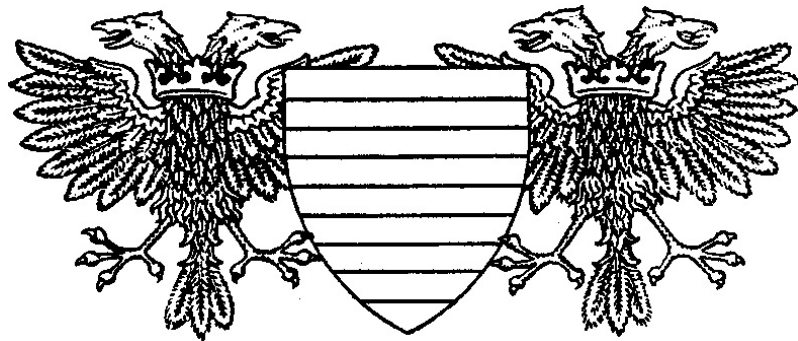


the Gulf of Mexico. It is said to bite a little hole in its victim - goat, sheep, cow, chicken, or even the odd human - and then suck all the blood out. This drawing (*previous* page) was supposed to have been made by an eyewitness who saw one briefly by lamplight in a deep cave before it jumped into the darkness of obscurity. Again the kangaroo seems to be a tempting model (*see No 40*).

Allowing for the hypothetical nature of its pretence, this book is really quite a good introduction to the world of Fabulous Beasts.

An Alphabet of Queries (29)

What is the Zimbabwe Bird? Carol Rose lists fifteen names starting with Z, but not this one. It is the emblem of the African country that adopted the name Zimbabwe, and it appears on its flag. It was taken from a soapstone carving found in the ruins of an ancient civilization to which the name at first applied. The present country had its boundaries defined when it was the British colony of Southern Rhodesia, who used this bird as the crest on their coat of arms, and with independence they took the name of the ancient civilization, and this crest, but with a new shield. Although the carving may have been intended to represent a natural bird of some sort, there is no doubt that it has now been granted mythic status, and serves as a totem for the new country.



Double-headed Eagles supporting the arms of the City of Salisbury, Wiltshire

Issued 23 April 2004 by Ralph Brocklebank, Orland, Clent, Stourbridge, Worcs DY9 9QS

Dragonlore

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Number 45

St George's Day 2004



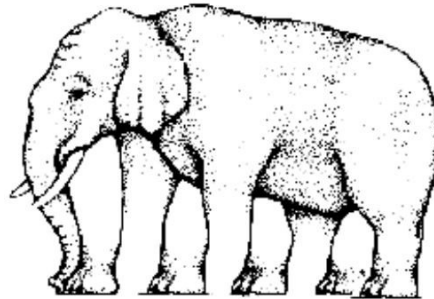
St George (and the Dragon?) by Sandra Del Prete



The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

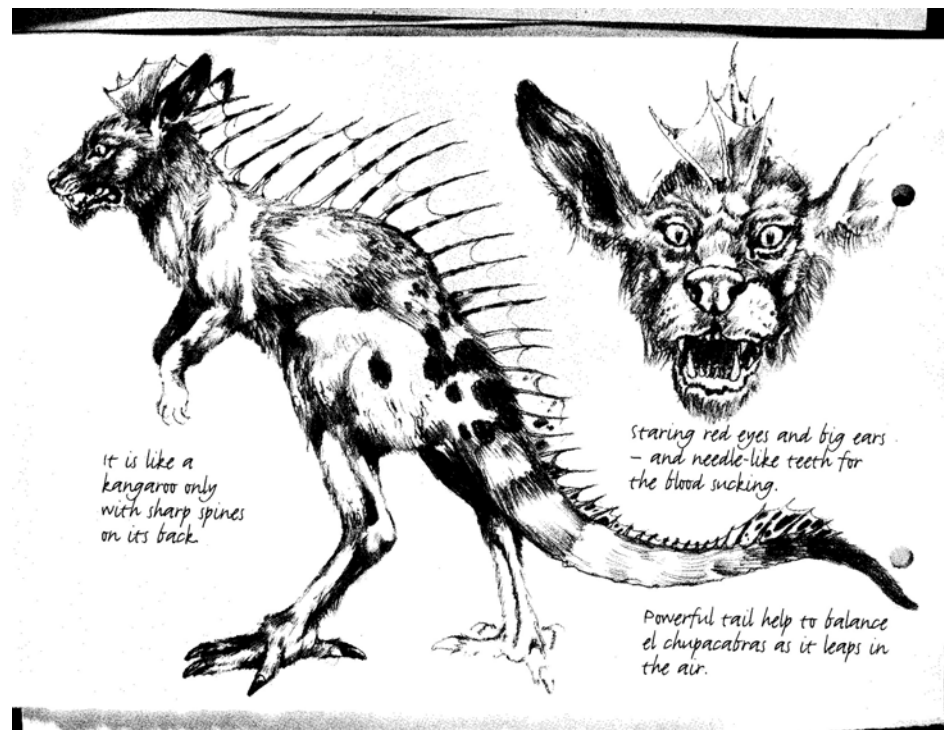
The design on the cover is taken from a delicate painting by the Swiss artist Sandra Del Prete, one of the illustrations in **The Fantastic World of Optical Illusions**, by Al Seckel (Carlton, 2002), which has a total of 272 examples of deception, cunning, ambiguity, impossible figures and sheer cussedness, including this odd eight-legged elephant (*on the right*). It raises the question of the reliability of the senses, and leads one to ask whether perhaps some of the reported sightings of monsters may have had their origin in optical illusions. Many of these effects are now not only well-known but also well understood, as research into the visual mechanisms of eye and brain have progressed, though there are still some which remain surprising and are hard to explain. Mistaking a seal for a mermaid if you are expecting to see a mermaid, or seeing a school of porpoises in line ahead as a single long sea-serpent, are quite easy to understand compared with some of these puzzle pictures, as is the difficulty of judging the true size of an unfamiliar object up in the air, though transforming a rhinoceros into a unicorn was probably not so much a visual illusion as an imaginative reconstruction from an imperfect description. Artists working from hearsay will inevitably make use of forms that are known to them (either from observation or from seeing other pictures), perhaps fitting different parts of familiar animals together to approximate the hitherto unknown creature as described to them. This could account for many of the strange beasts shown in the bestiaries, but why serpents were given heads like dogs with ears is still a bit of a mystery, let alone their bird's wings and legs that transformed them into dragons.

The picture of St George on the cover is not only a typical ambiguous figure, it is also an example of a potential infinite regression, as the head of the mounted figure is a miniature replica of the whole, and so could theoretically be repeated for ever, getting smaller and smaller, another clever puzzle.



headings as follows:- 6 Insects, molluscs and amphibia (such as Kraken and Salamander), 5 Reptiles (Dragons, Sea-serpents...), 6 Birds (Phoenix, Thunderbirds...), 7 Mammals (Pegasus, Unicorn...), 13 Hybrids (Basilisk, Manticore, Griffon...), 14 Manimals (Mermaids, Sphinx, Lamassu, Minotaur...) and 21 Hominids (Vampire, Yeti and so on, with Fairies, Ogres and the like). Fully illustrated throughout, with a few old favourites but much stunning new art-work, some of it in the style of field sketch-books but some elaborate set-piece paintings said to decorate the rooms at 100 Piccadilly, it takes the view that all these creatures once existed in fact, and that many of them still do so in faraway corners of the earth. Most of the information given will be familiar to dracologists, but occasionally they will be brought up short by an apparently dogmatic statement, for example, that Griffons undoubtedly still exist in the far north of Siberia, though Hippogryphs are now quite extinct, or the remark that any cryptozoologist will immediately spot the error in Uccello's picture of St George (*see No 32*): "The 'dragon' has only two legs and is therefore a wyvern."

One of the less familiar fabulous mammals treated, in fact the only one not previously encountered, is the **Chupacabras** (which is Spanish for "goat-sucker"), a 4-5ft high bloodsucking biped found in caves in countries around



The Centaur's Dilemma

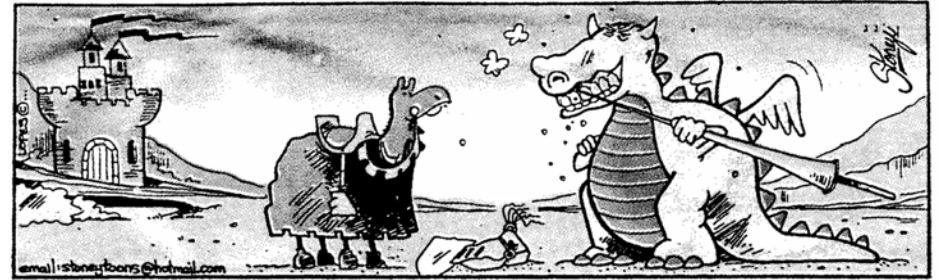


Drusilla Armitage had a holiday in Greece, where she found this saucy postcard. If there are indeed still Centaurs about, the Greeks will have to tighten up their security arrangements before the Olympic equestrian events take place this summer. Of course, there are those who believe that the origin of the Centaur lay in distant observation by Greeks of the horsemen of the steppes, who used the forward seat and moved at one with their mounts, even at the gallop, whereas the Greeks typically sat well back on their ponies and jogged along at a gentle pace. The story of the adoption of the forward seat in modern equestrian events, that started with the Italian Army show-jumping team, and has completely transformed all kinds of horse-racing, hunting and cross-country competition, is an instructive example of the triumph of innovation, based on a close study of the horse's natural movements, over the inertia of tradition. In all these events, horses are now treated as partners, rather than as servants or "underdogs," and give much better performances as a result. So perhaps the Centaurs have won in the end.

BOOK REVIEW

Fabulous Creatures and other Magical Beings, written by Joel Levy and edited by David Gould (London, 2004), purports to be a file compiled by The Cryptozoological Society of London, said to be founded on 1st April 1848 with an address in London at 100 Piccadilly (all a bit of a giveaway!). It gives information on 72 such creatures and beings, listed under seven

The fate of a feeble forerunner of St George:



Fabulous Beasts at Chatham

Derek Taylor has kindly sent details of the stained glass windows which form the Memorial of the Chatham Port Division, 1939-1945, in the Church of St George, Royal Naval Barracks, Chatham. The windows, which comprise thirteen vertical lights in all, were the work of Hugh Easton, who is probably better known for the Battle of Britain Memorial in Westminster Abbey. They embody, apart from a number of religious symbols, the badges of ninety-four of His Majesty's Ships, representative of the many manned from the Chatham Port Division lost by enemy action. Among the many emblems displayed may be found two Dragons, a Sea-Lion, a Sphinx, a Firedrake (*see right*) and an heraldic Dolphin. Three of the windows have a special purpose: these represent activities in which Chatham ships and people played a notable part. The North Africa Memorial Window has a full-length St Michael slaying a silver Dragon, the Dunkirk Memorial Window has the figure of St George slaying a green Dragon, while the W.R.N.S. Memorial Window, devoted to all those Wrens who lost their lives in both the World Wars, has an energetic St Margaret of Antioch dealing forcibly with a red Dragon. Apart from their dracological interest, these windows are a splendid example of the craft, and well worth a visit.



UPDATE on the DRAGON in a JAR

Under the headline “**Dragon flies to rescue of debut author’s book deal,**” the *Daily Telegraph* of 29 March 2004 revealed that the story about the supposed hoax of a pickled baby dragon, as reported here in No 41, was itself a huge hoax, or rather, a publicity stunt. It seems that the author, Allistair Mitchell, who writes under the name of P R Moredun, was having difficulty getting publishers interested in his fantasy novel *Unearthly History*, a thriller in which humans are helped by dragons in a fight to save the world. The baby dragon used in the stunt was specially made by the model-making firm Crawley Creatures, which had a hand in the BBC’s *Walking with Dinosaurs* series, and a picture of it on the cover of his book, along with all the publicity that the original story engendered, has helped him to obtain an agreement to market his novel. So things are seldom what they seem, but a hoax about a hoax must be a new departure. What will dragons inspire next?

More on the Male Griffin, Keythong, Ormogriff, or whatever...

Peter Spurrier’s crest (*seen right*) has a demi-Male Griffin holding a spur, while his shield is party per chevron with two Male Griffin’s heads in chief and a spur in base. Peter evidently has an affinity with Male Griffins, and he reports that he has seen a picture of the Griffon Vulture (note the spelling!), a bird native to Mediterranean countries, sitting with a following wind blowing its feathers up into spiky tufts, rather like the spikes shown on drawings of the Male Griffin. He wonders whether such an observation might have led to the depiction of this creature in the first place. Allowing for the Vulture to be sitting with its wings folded and so not very obvious, and its crouching position concealing the absence of a griffin’s leonine rear parts, it is just about possible. But



knowing that the Tudor heralds enjoyed devising odd new creatures for their clients, would they have needed such a visual spur to assign a wingless Griffin to the Butler Dukes of Ormond? (Could it have been an inept appropriation of an ancient Irish monster, as happened with the Enfield?) Apparently not all the Ormond Dukes’ wingless Griffin supporters had the spikes, nor the tusks and horns that appeared later. The badge of the Royal Navy ship HMS Ormonde* (*left*), a silver wingless Griffin with golden collar,



chain and talons on a black field, was taken from a supporter of the 2nd Duke, who commanded the forces that captured Vigo in 1702. In fact, this warship, a Minesweeping Sloop that was ordered in 1917, built in 1918, converted to a Surveying Ship in 1924 and sold in 1937, was one of a class of twenty-four ships all named after Derby winners (so we have here a chain of name-transfers with four links - a ship from a racehorse from a Duke from an ancient region of East Munster, in other words, a place in Ireland, originally *Ur Mhumhain*.)

To return to the question of what this creature should properly be called, there is no outstanding favourite. Some think that it is too late to change the established usage of “Male Griffin,” even if “mailed griffin” was at first intended, and as for the confusion over the false implication that if a male griffin is wingless, then a winged griffin must be female, it has even been said that this all adds to the fun. As to the suggestion that the spelling “gryphon” might be reserved for the wingless form, this brought an indignant response from one well-respected author who said that he always used this spelling for both forms, as it was closer to the original Greek.

The name Keythong still has its adherents, arguing that it is distinctive and was advocated by Garter Cole, who certainly knew a thing or two, and as for its meaning of a lanyard or cord to hang a key from, as in the Ormond knot, that is really no objection as we have plenty of other examples of transferred names.

The proposal of Ormogriff has a few supporters, but it would seem not enough to displace current usage. Short of holding a nation-wide voting contest, in the style of the BBC finding Britain’s favourite author, or poem, or Great Briton, it seems unlikely that we could reach a decision. We can only hope that all writings about fabulous beasts will make it clear that winged griffins can be of the male sex, and, outside Perugia, usually are so depicted. And what about a female Male Griffin?

[A note on the spelling “Griffon” - When Rolls-Royce introduced an aero-engine with this name, and they were accused of abandoning their tradition of using the names of Birds of Prey in favour of Fabulous Creatures, they replied that one should check the spelling and that this engine was named after a species of Vulture. The French favour this spelling, the name also referring to a small wiry-haired dog like a terrier, and there is an HMCS Griffon in the Canadian Navy, perhaps influenced by French usage, with a very fine badge showing a black Griffin with red beak and claws, on a white field.]

*Ormonde’s badge, and Firedrake’s, and some others we have used, were taken from Derek Taylor’s book *A Pictorial Index of Royal Naval Ship’s Badges 1918 to 1995* (Colchester, 1995).