

More Prairie Critters

Darren George's colleague, George Lucki, writing in *The Prairie Tressure*, says that the **Friggin** is not just an euphemistic epithet, but actually the reverse of the Griffin, that is to say, a hybrid monster with the front half of a lion and the rear parts of an eagle (*illustrated on the right*). Here it is seen in the rampant pose, and certain internal clues suggest that this is a computer-generated image. In fact, George admits that the rear part of the beast is derived from an heraldic falcon



complete with its leg-tether, but maintains that by convention, when part of a Friggin, it is always referred to as an eagle. Perhaps it would look rather more heraldic if shown "displayed" (*see left*). George gives a description of its life and habits "upon high outcroppings of sandy hoodoos in the fabled Badlands of southeastern Alberta."

Another submission to the Critter Contest, from Graham Scott, is the small but adaptable **Weebit**, part friendly rabbit and part cunning weasel (*see right*). They are prolific in Alberta, where "one weebit is inevitably followed by another, and another and perhaps one more for good measure.... Western hospitality being legendary, every guest is, as a matter of course, welcome to have a weebit."



NEWS FLASH

Patrick Woodhead writes from Kathmandu about his current expedition in search of the Yeti (*The Daily Mail*, 5 May 2004). Still hopeful! (See No 44)

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Dragonlore

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Dragon's Head by Peter Spurrier, painted in 1969



The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

We welcome new members Anthony Bruce, Antony Denning, David Hawkings, Annie Robertson, Andrew Roe, Vernon Rolls and David Vaudrey.

St Alban was Britain's first Christian martyr. Born in Verulanium (now named after him) in the 3rd century, he converted to Christianity late in life and suffered martyrdom by the sword about 304 AD. King Offa of Mercia founded the monastery at St Alban's, on the alleged site of his death, in 795, and the abbey church became the Cathedral in 1877 with the creation of the new Diocese. The saint's feast day falls on 17th June. There is today a frigate in the Royal Navy, HMS St Albans, named after the Duke whose title comes from the town that was named after the saint, making a name-chain of four links, with not a dragon in sight.

The dragon's head on the cover was painted in 1969 by Peter Spurrier who was at the time a design consultant for the Investiture of the Prince of Wales that was celebrated at Caernarfon Castle. There were many design innovations around this event, including a modernistic coronet for the Prince and a stunning new uniform for Lord Snowdon as Constable of the Castle, which he designed for himself, as well as a great profusion of banners and gonfanons featuring plenty of red dragons. It was probably this festival which promoted the dragon to the prime position in the Welsh consciousness, a place previously held by the Prince of Wales's Feathers, an attractive and much-used emblem that was now recognised as the symbol of the Heir to the English Throne and not really Welsh at all. The ambiguity remains. In those days far more Welsh regiments had the feathers in their cap-badge than had the dragon, but that was because of



A German Monster

Vernon Rolls is the proud possessor of a collection of Munich calendars, which were illustrated by Otto Hupp, reckoned to be the best German heraldic artist of his time, and he has sent in this page from the 1903 edition, showing the arms of the Wurmbrand family. Canting on the name, both shield and crest show a black Lindwurm, a sort of wingless dragon well known in the folklore of northern Europe, and, as the Lindworm, frequently seen in English church carvings (usually wingless *and* legless), holding in his mouth a stick burning at both ends, for the Brand. Vernon adds that the German word *Lind* means soft and gentle, which may account for the fact that this beast is rather obviously female, though it could be an old word for *snake*. It is a rarity in British heraldry, but when it does turn up, it is commonly blazoned as a *wingless wyvern*, though it seldom has the panache of this Lindwurm.

Vernon also recommended a book by Gore Vidal, *A Search for the King* (New York 1950; London, with a new Introduction by the author, 1993) which tells the story of Blondel and Richard the Lion-Heart in a fanciful and colourful manner, with brief appearances of a dragon, a cannibalistic giant (who is very fond of young shepherd boys), a lady vampire and a friendly unicorn. These all appear in a matter-of-fact fashion, in true mediaeval style, as incidents in the troubadour's adventures. His travels are mostly set in Austria and Germany, but a map would have been helpful.



there been no Beethoven there would be no “Ode to Joy;” or if no J.K. Rowling, then no Harry Potter. Once created, of course, these things form part of our culture and assume a life of their own, but the question remains whether imagination can be so disciplined that it can be used as a means to discover truths that may lie outside the limits of the material world as it has been defined by scientists. The world of dracology lies in this marginal realm, and though Highfield brings much welcome clarity into the relationship of magic and science, it is perhaps too easy to dismiss fabulous beasts as simply mistaken, albeit imaginative, attempts at explaining certain fossil remains. Would the bones of a dinosaur be seen as those of a dragon if the idea of the dragon were not already in place?

Dragons and Dinosaurs

There is no doubt that the discovery of dinosaur remains, and the subsequent reconstructions of what they might have been like during their lifetime, has had its influence on the way that dragons have been depicted, presumably on the assumption that dinosaurs were the original dragons. One of the most delightful examples of this influence is in Turner’s sublime figures-in-a-landscape painting of *The Goddess of Discord in the Garden of the Hesperides*, in which the dragon Ladon, the son of Typhon and Echidna, perched on a rocky prominence, guards the pass that is the entrance to the Garden. Originally painted in the style of a mediaeval heraldic dragon, Ladon was repainted by Turner after fossil dinosaurs had been discovered and reconstructions published, to make it appear more “realistic.” The fact that the fossil was a marine species and would not have been perched on top of a cliff, was just an unfortunate misunderstanding, since the fossil itself may have been discovered in a cliff-top as a result of geological uplift. It is not generally supposed that the idea of dragons arose from the direct experience of living dinosaurs, though modern cartoons and films which show cave-men co-existing with creatures that had been long extinct even in *their* day do engender a certain confusion in the popular mind, but it is suggested that early attempts at reconstructing living beasts from the evidence of fossils could have led to images that became dragons. Certainly the pictures of dragons in children’s books and in films are now much more like dinosaurs than they used to be, with their ponderous bodies and long tapered necks and tails, often decorated with rows of triangular plates. On the other hand, the historical evidence would seem to show that dragons originated with serpents, and their subsequent acquisition of ears, legs, horns and wings was a result of artistic exuberance rather than from any observations in the realm of natural history. There is much still to discover.

their loyalty to the Prince. Although not of Welsh origin, the feathers deserve to remain as a Welsh emblem by association, but nowadays they are seen far less often than the Red Dragon. One fine example is this drawing by Anthony Jones showing the dragon charged on the shoulder with the arms of the Prince of Wales, which he uses as his personal totem (*bottom of previous page*).

FEEDBACK

Roger Barnes writes to point out that the drawing of the arms of the New Zealand Law Society with its Manaia supporters (in No 43), though sent in by him, was not his work. This indeed should have been obvious to those familiar with his own distinctive style. Several of his drawings have featured in these pages, including the Dragon (No 25), the Male Griffin (No 31), and the Lamia (No 32). To these we can now add this Griffin supporter of the arms of Diana, Princess of Wales (*right*), taken from *The New Zealand Armorialist*, No 89 (Summer 2004). For those who like to colour these things in, the body is Ermine, the wings Erminois, the beak, beard, forelegs, coronet and chain Or, and the tongue and claws Gules. Roger has now produced a delightful new booklet, *Armorial Bearings of the Surnames of Scotland, Volume One* (Auckland 2004), with 51 shields of arms in colour, which include the three blue griffins of Forsyth, the martlets, three each, for Cairns and for Rutherford (gold and black respectively), and the three black unicorns’ heads for Preston.



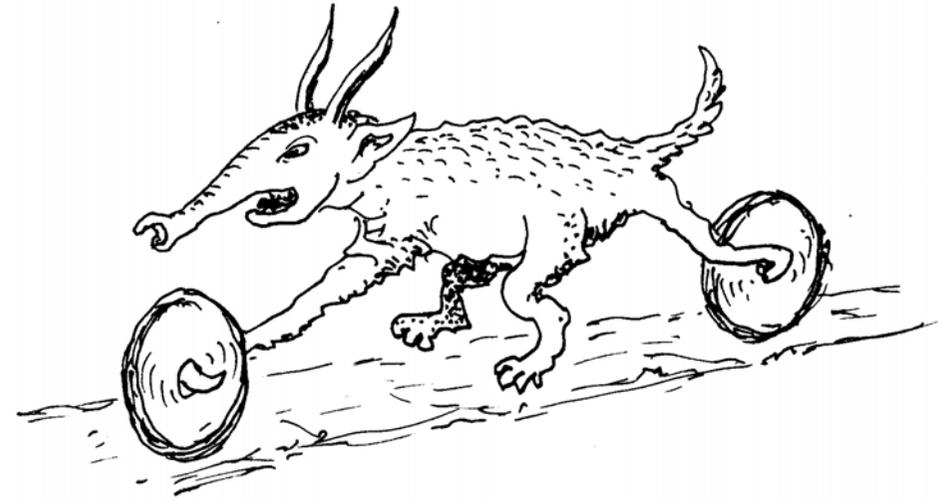
Fabulous Beasts in Pullman's Trilogy

Philip Pullman's series of three books with the generic title *His Dark Materials* makes a continuous adventure story using to great effect the notion of parallel worlds. The first, *Northern Lights* (London 1995), introduces armoured bears, polar bears that have developed speech and certain metallurgical skills, witches, who are girls with extraordinary powers, and cliff-ghasts, which are unpleasant black winged creatures that might just pass as fabulous beasts, but its most notable innovation is the idea of the personalised *daemon*, an animal or bird that accompanies each person and represents what might be the soul. The second book, *The Subtle Knife* (London 1997), has some spectres, ghosts and angels, but no real fabulous beasts. In the third part, *The Amber Spyglass* (London 2000), we meet Harpies on the classical model, but also an entirely novel family of creatures. Mary Malone, an Oxford scientist, having followed the heroine, Lyra, into one new parallel world, then makes her way into another and there comes across some very unusual animals, which from a distance look like grazing deer, but when closer, are seen to have a strange arrangement of their legs, one at the front, one on each side, and one at the back. Later, Mary meets a group of related creatures with the same leg arrangement, attached not to a backbone but to a diamond-shaped frame, and with a prehensile trunk with which they can carry out simple manipulations, horns, and most surprising of all, wheels. These latter are actually circular seed-pods which the animals hook their front and back claws into, using their side legs to push themselves along, rather like the first velocipedes. They have a form of speech, various kinds of craft, and a social organization, and Mary realizes that they are people. She learns how to talk with them, and discovers that they are called *mulefa*, collectively, with an individual being a *zalif*. One of their fears is being attacked by what Mary first took to be sailing boats, but turned out to be the *Tualapi*, another variety of diamond-framed creature whose front and back limbs had developed into giant wings (or sails, when they were swimming like swans) and instead of trunks had long fierce beaks.

The adventure concludes with a satisfactory war in heaven, as it were, in which the authoritarian powers are defeated and the kingdom of heaven overthrown. The main characters, Mary Malone included, return to their proper respective worlds, and Lyra's final spoken wish is to help establish a republic of heaven.

The whole trilogy was transformed into a two-part drama, put on at the National Theatre, which was highly acclaimed, first for the extensive use for the first time of all the ingenious stage machinery, and then, not so much for the stars who appeared in it, Patricia Hodge, Niamh Cusack and Timothy

Dalton, for instance, but for the performance of the young actress Anna Maxwell Martin who played the part of Lyra. Unfortunately, the whole subplot in which Mary Malone appeared was cut from the play, so we never discovered what *mulefa* were supposed to look like. Was it something like this (*below*)?



Mulefa ?

BOOK REVIEW

The Science of Harry Potter: How Magic Really Works by Roger Highfield (London 2002), has a disclaimer on the front cover, which spells out clearly, "Not approved or endorsed by J.K.Rowling or Warner Bros." The author is the Science Editor of *The Daily Telegraph* and is not unknown to our readers (see Nos 41 and 43). In fact, whole paragraphs that we quoted from the newspaper were taken directly from this book, which gives lucid descriptions of illusions and hallucinations, game theory, fossil interpretations, genetic modification and numerous other fields in which recent scientific developments may be on the way to explaining or even matching magical effects. Highfield declares himself to be a fan of Harry Potter, as a work of imagination. He sees science as uncovering the objective nature of the material world, which is thought to exist independently of whether it is discovered. If Newton had not revealed the nature of universal gravitation, he says, somebody else would have done, because gravity exists objectively and does not depend upon whoever investigates it. This is quite different from the world of art and imagination, where it is certain that had