

trolls inhabit mountains and caves and often work as smiths. Trolls are said to despise noise – as demonstrated by the troll who lived under a bridge who was enraged by the noise of the billy-goats gruff tramping overhead.

**Chichevache & Bicorn** Two beasts popular in French mythology. The former fed on patient and loving wives (and was, therefore, very thin); the latter fed on good and enduring husbands (and was correspondingly fat). (*See also No 48, page 3*)

**Sagittary** A terrifying archer, half beast and half man, whose eyes sparkled like fire, and struck dead like lightning. Sagittary was introduced into the Trojan armies by Guido da Colonna. (*If this is not a centaur, it needs further investigating.*)



**NEWSFLASH** (from *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 September 2004)

#### Open season on a ‘monster’

Sweden’s mythical Great Lake Monster will soon be fair game for hunters and curio seekers as its protected status is to be lifted, local authorities said yesterday.

Legends tell of a huge black serpent with a cat-like head, and a snake-like beast is depicted on a Viking rune stone on an island in the Storsjon lake. The law protecting the beast, in place since 1986, is to be lifted after a request from a local man for permission to collect its eggs forced local authorities to acknowledge that it is not a valid species.

“Of course we believe it exists,” Peter Lif, head of legal affairs for the region of Jamtland said. “But we find ourselves forced to lift its protection.”

*Reuters, Stockholm*

*(This makes an interesting comparison with Peter Scott’s action in registering a scientific name for the Loch Ness Monster, so that it could receive official protection if it ever happened to be discovered!)*

# Dragonlore

The Journal of The College of Dracology

Number 51

St Ninian’s Day 2004



Harpy or Frauenadler on Nuremberg’s coat of Arms, drawn by Durer



## The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

Welcome to new member Royston Griffey, whose arms were in No 36.

*St Ninian was born in Cumbria in the fourth century, the son of a prince. He adopted Christianity, and went to Rome to study, returning as a bishop (consecrated in 394) to spread the faith among the Picts. He built a stone church at Whithorn in Galloway and his missionary work covered a huge diocese from Wales to the Grampians, from the land of dragons to the monster of Loch Ness. He died around 432. Although his success in converting the heathen was permanent, the cathedral at Whithorn is now a ruin.*

In his booklet *Monsters of Heraldry*, Roger Barnes gives two whole pages to the **Harpy**, with five illustrations, including the one on our cover, and the Astley crest below. According to classical mythology, harpies were revolting creatures with disgusting habits. They had the body of a vulture but with the head of an old woman (see right, from an ancient Greek amphora), and should not be confused with the Siren, which had the body of a bird, but the head and sometimes the breasts of a beautiful young maiden (see left, from a vase of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC).



They appear in English heraldry in Tudor times, this example (below) coming from the Garter stall-plate of Sir John Astley, and it has been suggested that the reason for its choice was not the harpy's repulsive nature, but its one redeeming feature, namely its unending remorse if it kills somebody. Sir John had accidentally killed an opponent in a joust, which may explain the harpy in his crest.



In English heraldry, the harpy is usually shown standing sideways, as in this example (right), but in the crest of

those close to death. Various descriptions as a beautiful woman or an old crone. (*But how can they say, as she has never been seen?*)

**Centaur** Beast of Greek mythology, half man and half horse. As followers of Dionysus, most centaurs were uncouth and wild but some, such as Chiron, won greater respect. Chiron was a great sage and prophet who upon his death was set among the stars as the constellation Sagittarius.



*Centaur beating a victim, after a Greek vase of the 5th century BCE.*

**Cerberus** The three-headed dog of classical mythology who guards the entrance to Hades. Living souls who visited the underworld had to pacify him with food, hence the expression "a sop for Cerberus."



*As one of his labours, the hero Heracles had to drag Cerberus, the guard-dog of the underworld, from the gate of Hades; from a detail on an Attic vase.*

**Griffin** A beast with a lion's body and an eagle's head, wings and claws. The griffin hoarded fragments of gold to construct its nest and, rather than eggs, laid an agate.

**Yeti** Unidentified ape-like beast said to inhabit the areas of scree in the Himalayas. The Yeti was first reported in 1889 but no sightings have been confirmed (although photographs exist of giant footprints). Otherwise known as the **Abominable Snowman**.

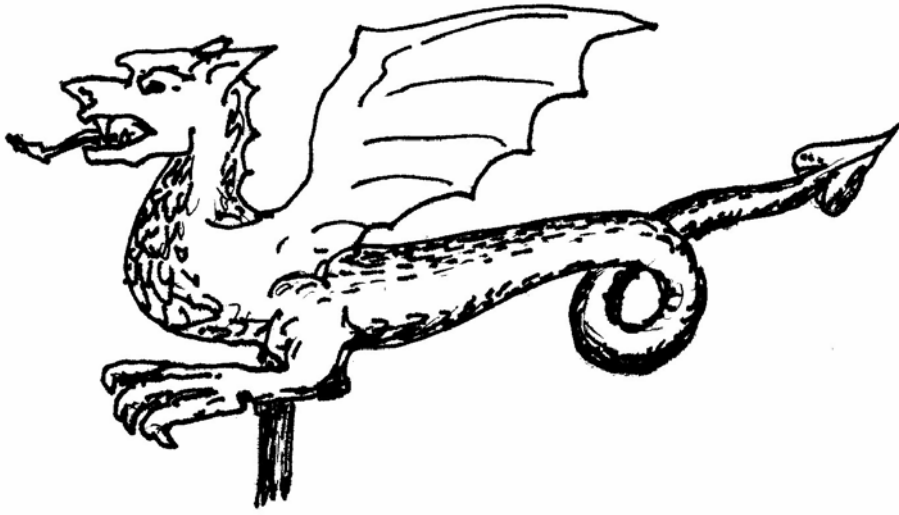
**Jinn** Originating in Arabia, these spirit-like beasts are said to be able to take the shape of any man or animal. Created 2,000 years before Adam, they are referred to in the Koran. Rather handily, evil jinns are hideously ugly, whereas good jinns are astoundingly beautiful.

**Troll** Beasts from Scandinavian folklore,



## Fabulous Beasts in Flanders

A week in Brugge for an heraldic congress did not leave much time for dragon hunting, and apart from a few miserable creatures being done in by effigies of St George, the most impressive discovery was a pair of life-size golden griffins guarding the tomb of a bishop in the church of San Salvator. How big are griffins? These ones stood five feet high from head to foot, with their wings extending up another foot at least. But a better dragon was seen on a day-trip to Ieper (called “Wipers” by the guides when talking to the English, since Flanders is fiercely Flemish and French names like Ypres are not favoured) Totally flattened in the first World War and completely reconstructed since, the enormous Cloth Hall is dominated by a tall belfry tower, and on its pinnacle is a golden dragon, maybe as a weather-vane, though there were no signs for the cardinal points of the compass. It is a true wyvern-type dragon, and though it was a long way up, an attempt was made to depict it accurately, as seen here.



## More from Schott's Bestiary of Uncommon Knowledge

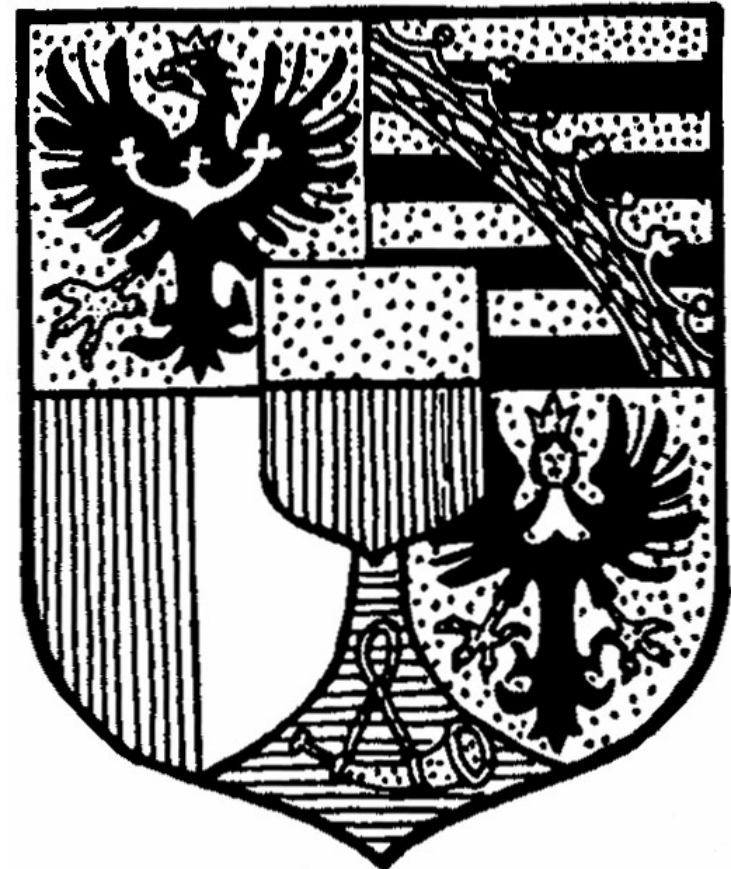
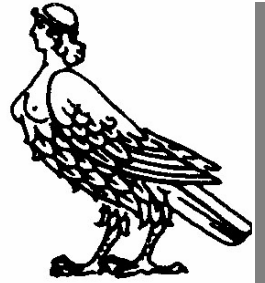
**Kraken** An enormous sea-beast which is said to lurk off the coast of Norway lying in wait for ships. It was first described in 1752 in Pontoppidan's *History of Norway* and probably arose from genuine sightings of a giant squid.

**Banshee** In Irish folklore this female spirit shrieks under the windows of

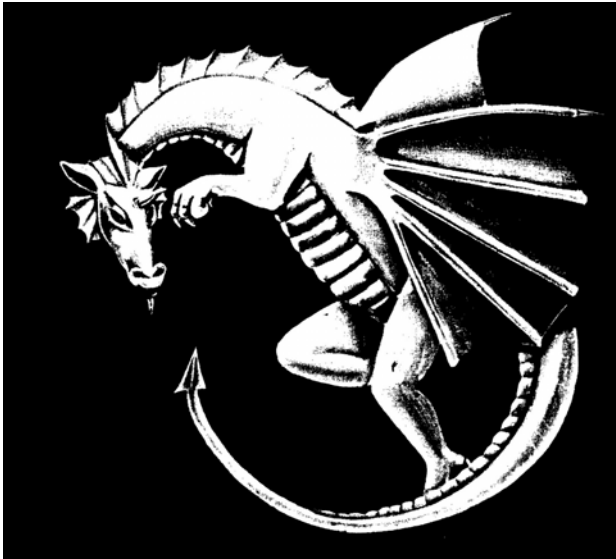
the Pochin family it is shown with a serpentine tail (left), thus being more like the French vouivre (see No 49). In German heraldry the *Frauenadler* (“woman-eagle”) is typically shown in the displayed or full-face position, not only in the arms of Nuremberg, as on the



cover, (which apparently originated in an eagle with a king's head and no breasts) but also in one of the quarterings of the well-known arms of Leichtenstein, representing East Frisia (below). Nearly all heraldic harpies seem to have comely faces, rather than haggard.



## Personal Imagination



*David Hawkings has sent in this poem, which he wrote “some time ago,” and also the painting by his friend Sara Goward. Alas, we cannot reproduce its glowing colours, but to give some idea, the dragon’s body is a brilliant turquoise with red eyes and a yellow and red armoured underbelly.*

### MY MYTHICAL DRAGON

Beyond the seas amidst the misty swamps  
There is a slithering creature like an encrusted tree.  
He circles in and out the murky depths,  
and no-one’s seen him, no-one that is ’cept me.

At night time when the moon is glowing in the sky  
he emerges from below the creaking undergrowth;  
many pass him as he rests in a motionless calm,  
no sign but bubbles from his bluish nose.

Sometimes he climbs upon a nearby rock  
to survey the scene for all around.  
He spreads his wings, a span of thirty feet  
and leaps into the air to leave his homely ground.

And flying ’round above the forests all below  
he often glides, serene and noiseless through the ether high above,  
it’s true this mythical dragon portrays a vision of fear  
but really he is just as docile as a cooing dove.

It’s only when he’s angered that he shows a tempered rage,  
and jets of fire then burst forth from his open mouth.  
He roars and thrashes with his fork-ed tail  
And then he lives up to his aged myth.

So if you see my beastly sailing through the breezy sky  
Do not be frightened by his scaley reptile form,  
for he is nothing but an angel in disguise  
with a loving heart and a touch so gentle and so warm.

*(Perhaps one should explain that David comes from Somerset.)*

### BOOK REVIEW

**ERAGON** by Christopher Paolini (London, 2004) is a book firmly in the Tolkien tradition, with a fifteen-year-old hero (going on sixteen – the author himself, perhaps, as he was only fifteen when he wrote it), a wise wizard figure, a friendly dragon, plenty of dwarves and elves and the wicked Urgals (like Orcs) and no end of magic. Even the map on the end-pages is very like Middle Earth, with its weird names taken from a multitude of linguistic traditions. Eragon, the young hero, has all the characteristics of an American country boy, but he finds a large shiny stone which then hatches into a dragon, and from then on his adventures become ever more magical and involved, as he discovers that he is destined to become a Dragon Rider, one of the nearly extinct elite who have the task of freeing the world from evil forces. He calls his tame dragon Saphira, possibly because she is blue, and they communicate largely through telepathy. Near the end of the book there is a mighty battle in which a host of Urgals is thoroughly defeated, but more trials lie ahead, and two more books in this “Inheritance” trilogy are in the pipeline, the next one to be entitled *Eldest*. Such teenage dramas must have been dreamt up many a time, but few have been so persuasively written down. First published in 2002 by the Paolini family, it made such an impression that it was taken on by one of the leading publishers of children’s books and has since received glowing reviews – “an impressive epic fantasy” said one. It is indeed a gripping adventure story, but it does not tell us much about dragons.

