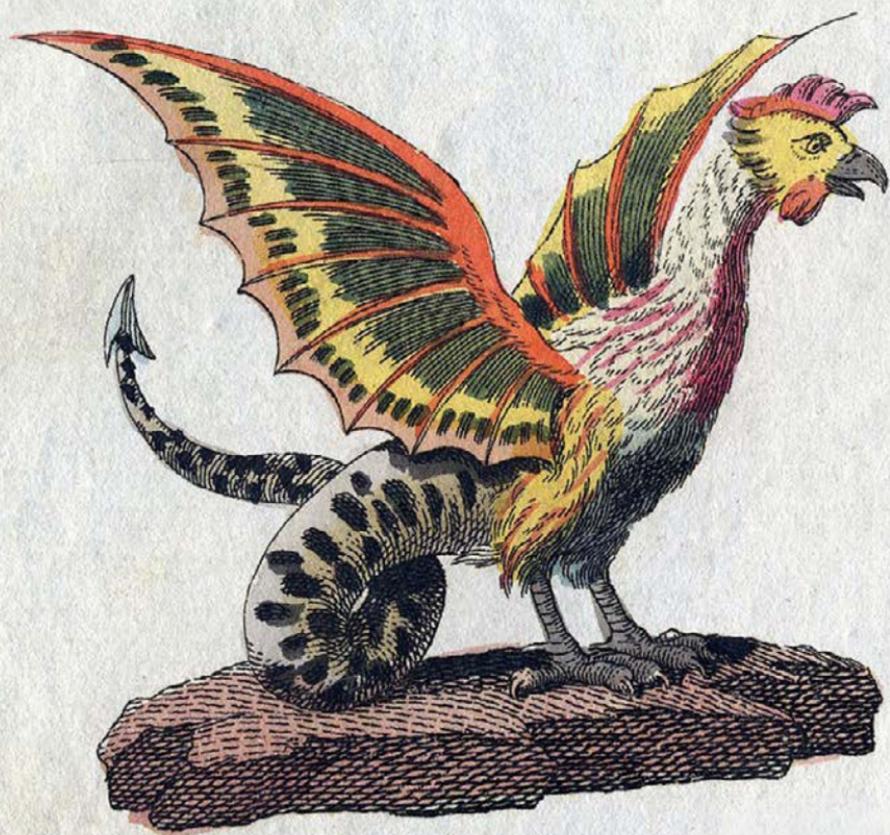


101 AMAZING
MYTHICAL
BEASTS



JACK GOLDSTEIN

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**101 AMAZING
MYTHICAL BEASTS**

Jack Goldstein

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Introduction

Did you know that a Hippogriff is supposedly the offspring of a horse and a griffin? Or that a Greek Sphinx generally has a male face, whereas an Egyptian one has a female visage? Where does the Skunk Ape roam, and how can you spot a Kitsune in human form? Is Slenderman the most frightening mythical creature, or is that honour bestowed on the fearsome Gashadokuro? This fantastic book contains details of over one hundred mythical beasts and legendary creatures, organised into categories for easy reference. Whether you are interested in the beasts of anywhere from Ancient Greece to modern-day Africa, this is the book for you!

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Classical - Part 1

1. **Salamander:** Although this species of *Urodela* (amphibians with a lizard-like appearance) is certainly real, the classical civilizations believed they had occult properties. For instance, although Pliny the elder was smart enough to distinguish the Salamander from actual lizards (in a taxonomical sense), he also held a belief that they could extinguish fire with their bodies. The *Talmud* (a Jewish Rabbinic text) states that smearing yourself in the blood of a salamander will make you immune from fire, and some believed that the creature was so poisonous that just by climbing around a tree it would poison its fruit so badly that anyone who ate even a single bite would perish immediately.
2. **Faun:** Half human and half goat, the Faun of classical mythology is often related to the wood-god Pan. Sometimes considered friendly (helping lost humans in need) but other times evil (causing intense fear in travellers in remote woodland locations), the creatures are often depicted in art playing the flute.
3. **Minotaur:** Half bull and half man, this creature was said to dwell in the middle of the *Labyrinth*; a maze on the island of Crete. Interestingly, there seems to be some disagreement between authors as to which half of the creature was which; whilst today we generally picture it as having the head of a bull but the body of a man, there is plenty of literature from the middle ages which depicts the reverse, more akin to a Centaur! In classical mythology, the Minotaur was eventually slain by Theseus.

4. **Centaur:** Perhaps one of the best-known of all creatures of classical mythology, the Centaur has the head, arms and torso of a man attached to the body and legs of a horse. Depicted most often as noble creatures (yet occasionally as the very embodiment of untamed nature) they are almost always male; female Centaurs are generally known as kentaurides.
5. **Phoenix:** The ancients believed that when it was a Phoenix's time to die, it would be consumed by flames and burn to a pile of ashes. From these embers the bird would be reborn, continuing an eternal cycle of death and rebirth. Believed to have been colourful and vibrant (although some believed it was red, others purple and a few even blue), the bird was said to be anything between the size of an eagle and an ostrich! Interestingly, there appear to be Phoenix parallels in many cultures, from the *Firebird* of Russia to the Turkish *Kerkes*, the *Fenghuang* of China, the Hindu *Anka* and more.
6. **Werewolf:** Although belief in a human/wolf hybrid was popularised in Europe in the middle ages, there are plenty of references to this beast in classical literature. For instance, a tribe called the *Neuri* were said to all have the ability to transform into wolves for several days each year, and Pliny tells us of how one man transformed into a wolf after placing his clothes on an ash tree and swimming across a lake. Admittedly however, it was around 1500 years later that the legend of the Werewolf took the form we know today, with subjects inflicted with the condition after being bitten. In some legends, the ability to transform is optional, whereas in others it is forced upon the subject when the moon is full. However most sources agree that a Werewolf can be killed by a silver bullet (or silver-tipped arrow).

7. **Unicorn:** The belief in Unicorns - essentially white or silver horses with a single horn on their head - dates back thousands of years, even before Greek and Roman times. The bible itself mentions a creature of this description called the *re'em*, which in many translations is called a Unicorn. Interestingly, the Greeks did not consider the Unicorn a mythological animal - they were absolutely convinced it existed in India. The animal was even described in intricate detail, including its call (which was said to be a deep lowing noise). In the middle ages, people believed the Unicorn to be more of a woodland animal, one that could only be captured by a virgin! In reading ancient descriptions of the Unicorn in more detail, some today have suggested that they might actually refer to the rhinoceros; strange as though this may sound, read what you may from this quote from Marco Polo that Unicorns are: “scarcely smaller than elephants. They have the hair of a buffalo and feet like an elephant’s. They have a single large black horn in the middle of the forehead... They have a head like a wild boar’s... They spend their time by preference wallowing in mud and slime. They are very ugly brutes to look at.”

8. **Harpies:** Appearing in both Greek and Roman mythology, the Harpies were birds with female human faces. Although in the earliest writings we have found, the creatures’ appearance is described as ‘beautiful’, public opinion seems to have changed over the years - and by Roman times they were said to be hideously ugly. According to Virgil, there were three Harpies - *Aello* (meaning ‘storm swift’), *Ocypete* (‘the swift wing’) and *Calaeno* (‘the dark’). The awful creatures remained present in leading literature for over a thousand years, with Dante’s *Inferno* (written in the middle ages) detailing how those who have committed suicide face their punishment in a tortured wood infested with Harpies.

9. **Griffin:** Often also spelt *Gryphon*, this creature has the body, tail and back legs of a lion, but the head, wings and front legs of an eagle. The Griffin was believed to be powerful and majestic, combining the nature of the kings of the beasts and of the birds. They were always said to guard treasure or possessions of untold wealth. Interestingly, belief in the creature dates back over five thousand years, with some historians speculating that ancient Egyptian and Persian people may have misidentified dinosaur remains found near a gold mine!

10. **Cerberus:** also known as the *Hellhound*, this multi-headed dog with a mane of snakes, the tail of a serpent and the claws of a lion guarded the entrance to the underworld and was responsible for preventing the living from entering - and the dead from escaping! There is much debate about the number of heads that Cerberus possessed; whereas the general consensus is three, some sources say two, and still others suggest as many as one hundred! Whereas Orpheus is said to have coaxed Cerberus into slumber with music, Virgil's *Aeneid* tells of how he was lulled into a deep sleep after eating drugged honeycakes.



Cerberus

European - Part 1

11. **Ceffyl Dŵr:** This Welsh water horse has the power not only to shape-shift at will, but also to fly. Some people say one can feel when Ceffyl Dŵr is nearby due to its foreboding presence and that you must never look into its fiery eyes, whereas others say he is purely a cheeky pest who playfully swims in mountain pools and over waterfalls. It is said that if you approach Ceffyl Dŵr, one of two things will happen - either it will evaporate into the mist, or it will jump out of the water and trample you to death.
12. **Ant Lion:** sometimes referred to as *Myrmecoleon* or *Formicaleon*, there are supposedly two forms of Ant Lion. One is the result of a lion mating with an ant, having the face of the former and the body of the latter. In this configuration, because the lion part can only eat meat yet the ant part can only digest grain, the creature starves to death after being born. On the other hand, some say it is a huge ant that hides amongst dust before jumping out to hunt other ants. This is perhaps one of the strangest hybrid creatures in the medieval bestiaries!
13. **Wyvern:** This beast has a reptile's body, two feet and a Dragon's head and tail. If you pay attention to European coats of arms, you will come across this creature quite often; it is even thought to have been the symbol of the medieval kingdom of Wessex. Another common place for the Wyvern to appear is on the badge of athletics teams in both Europe and America. According to legend, you may - if you are lucky enough - come across a *Sea-Wyvern*, which sports a fish's tail rather than that of a Dragon and is (of course) water-dwelling.

14. **Barbegazi:** Featuring in French and Swiss mythology, the Barbegazi are small white-furred gnomes that sport extremely long beards and enormous feet which they use as skis to navigate around their mountain homeland. These creatures hibernate during the warmer summer months and are rarely sighted by humans - except to help round up lost sheep or warn of an impending avalanche by whistling.

15. **Owlman:** It is 1976 and a man by the name of Don Melling is taking a holiday in Cornwall with his two daughters. Walking past Mawnan church, the girls look up and see a terrifying sight - a cross between a man and an owl hovering around the belltower. Running to their father they abandon their holiday and drive back to Lancaster. If you find this hard to believe, perhaps the second sighting that came two months later will convince you... a fourteen year old girl reported seeing a huge owl as big as a man with pointed ears and red eyes whilst camping in woods close to the church. Still not enough? Over the next two years, more and more people reported seeing what came to be dubbed *Owlman*, with no explanation offered other than the supernatural or paranormal. Interestingly, in 1989, over a decade after talk of the monster had subsided, a witness described having seen a very similar beast in the area; one which five years later a visitor from Chicago also saw...

16. **Shug Monkey:** Living between Balsham and West Wrattling in Cambridgeshire, this cryptid has an ape-like body and head, but huge paws more akin to a dog. Locals say they have seen the beast walking on all fours, but when approached it faded away like a dissolving apparition. Little is known of the origin of the Shug Monkey - even the etymology is unknown - although some believe the myth dates back to Norse settlers from over a thousand years ago.

17. **Salmon of Knowledge:** Also known as *Fintan mac Bóchra*, this 'big fish' of Irish legend gained all the world's knowledge by eating nine hazelnuts from nine different trees that surrounded the *Well of Wisdom*. Anyone who found the fish and subsequently cooked and ate it would themselves gain all of this knowledge - and according to the stories, a servant boy called Fionn did just that.
18. **Reynardine:** mentioned commonly in English ballads of Victorian times, this *Werefox* is said to attract beautiful women to him who he then captures, taking them to his castle of bones. Worryingly, no original source ever tells us what happens to the women once they reach their destination - perhaps every single one of them is still there, wherever it is!
19. **Grim:** Also known as *Padfoot*, *Shag* and *Skriker*, there are tales across most of Europe that refer to this blackest of dogs. Some say that seeing one is a sure sign of impending doom, whereas others tell tales of a ghost who barks throughout the night but causes harm to none. Perhaps the strangest *Black Dog* legend is in Devon, where the headless *Yeth Hound* (said to be the spirit of an unbaptised child) prowls through woodland, all the time a-wailing.
20. **Hippogriff:** First described fully in the 16th century, the Hippogriff is said to be the offspring of a horse and a *Griffin*; it is essentially a winged horse with the head and shoulders of an eagle. Apparently able to fly to the moon and back, the Hippogriff is extremely fast and can only be ridden by magicians.



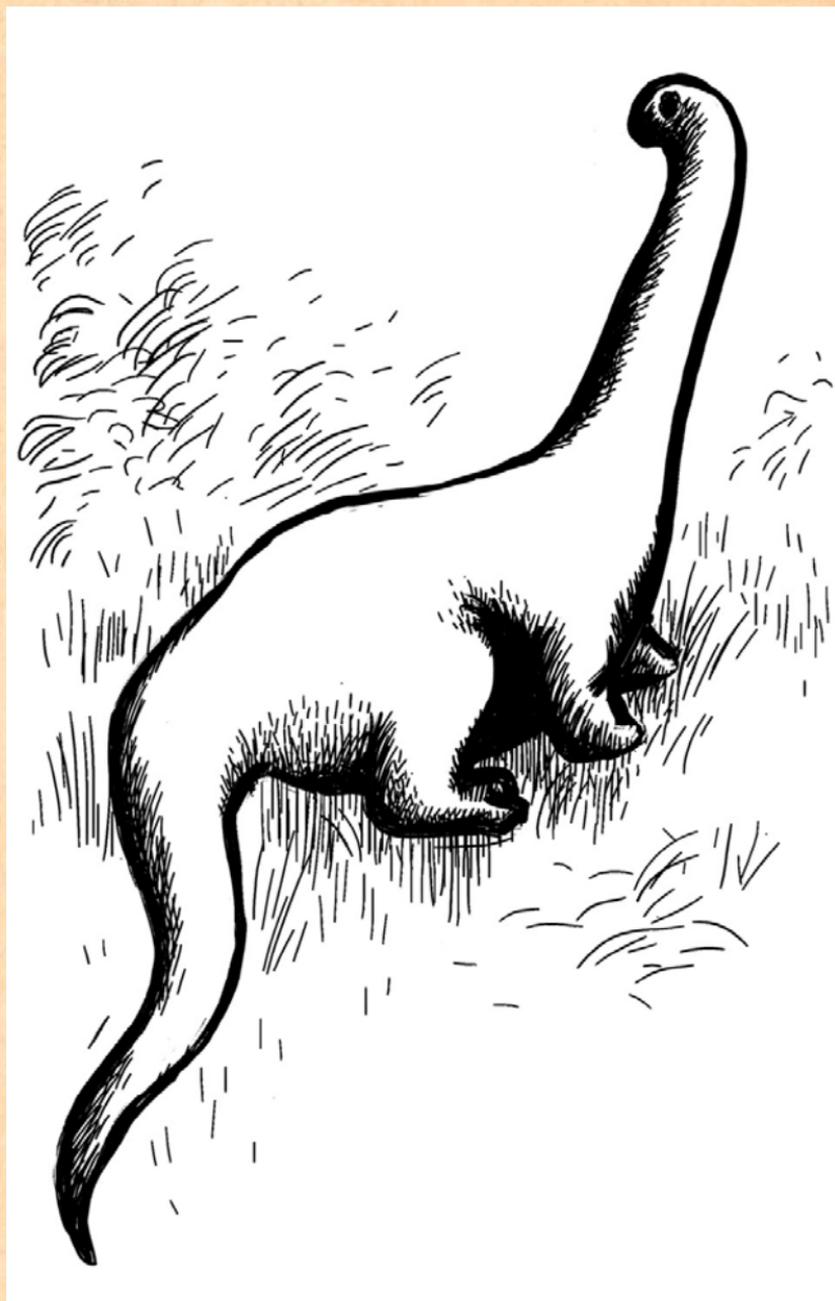
A Hippogriff

African

21. **Anansi:** this West African God most often takes the form of a spider, although sometimes appears as a man. Some people even tell tales of him appearing as a spider with clothes, or as a man with eight legs! He is the stereotypical trickster, always gaining the upper hand with his guile and cunning. Although mischievous, Anansi is in fact good, acting on behalf of his father *Nyame*, the Sky God. It is said that Anansi brought all of the stories into the world.
22. **Emela Ntouka:** in Central Africa, Pygmy tribes speak of the *Emela-Ntouka*, an elephant-sized creature with a body and head (including horn) of a rhinoceros, yet possessing a much heavier tail. Inhabiting the swamps and lakes of the Congo, Cameroon and Zambia, the creature is greatly feared - even though it is said to be herbivorous.
23. **Ngoloko:** also known as the *Nandi Bear*, this beast - similar in nature (although not necessarily in appearance) to a *Yeti* - is said to live in western Kenya. With high front shoulders and a sloping back similar to that of a hyena, descriptions of this beast most closely resemble an extinct species called *Chalicotherium*. As with many cryptids, one wonders whether a species has truly become extinct, or if there is a possibility that a small pack or community has continued living in secret to this day.
24. **Inkanyamba:** the Zulu tribes of Pietermaritzburg in South Africa tell tales of a huge serpent with a horse's head that lives in a waterfall lake underneath the Howick Falls. The beast's anger is said to be responsible for storm activity during the summer months.

25. **Mbielu-Mbielu-Mbielu:** if you are knowledgeable about dinosaurs, have a go at naming one that fits the description of the *Mbielu-Mbielu-Mbielu...* 'a four-legged herbivorous beast roughly ten metres long with a short neck, a medium sized tail and planks covered in green algae growing out of its back'. If you instantly thought 'stegosaurus' then you are in agreement with many who have studied the tale of this creature. It originates from the Republic of the Congo and has been seen only near two villages - Bounila and Ebolo.
26. **Ninki Nanka:** this Dragon-like creature of West African folklore is large and dangerous. Inhabiting the swamps of the region, the beast eats children who disobey their parents by venturing into its territory. A number of people claim to have seen the *Ninki Nanka*, and as recently as 2006 there have been expeditions to Gambia to try and find the monster.
27. **Popobawa:** should you be sitting outside your homestead on the Tanzanian island of Pemba late one night, and begin to smell a strange sulphurous odour, it is time to run or fight - Popobawas are about to attack. These terrifying shape-shifters most often take the form of giant bats, although they can transmute at will between this and human form. Belief in the Popobawas continues to this day in the region, and as recently as 2007 there were mass panics due to reported attacks by these awful beasts. Should you be the subject of their wrath, you are forced to tell your friends - as the Popobawas will continue their visits to you if you not do so.
28. **Jengu:** the Sawa people of Cameroon have legends that tell of mermaid-like figures who live in both fresh and saltwater. With gap-toothed smiles and long woolly hair they bring good fortune (such as curing disease) to those who worship them.

29. **Mokele-mbembe:** whereas *Mbielu-Mbielu-Mbielu* is said to resemble a stegosaurus, *Mokele-mbembe* has the appearance of a sauropod such as a diplodocus. Dwelling in the waters of the Congo River basin, there have been many real-life expeditions to try and spot the creature, none successful. Similar in nature to the stories of the *Loch Ness Monster*, one must wonder whether it is truly possible for a species of dinosaur to have survived into the modern day in one of the least explored areas on the planet...
30. **Rompo:** perhaps one of the most interesting 'hybrid' animal legends of Africa, the Rompo has the head of a hare (but with the ears of a human), a skeletal body, the front arms of a badger and the hind legs of a bear. The only food this creature eats is human corpses, and when it does find a tasty morsel it sings as it swallows the sweet dead flesh.



Mokele-mbembe

Asian

31. **Jorōgumo:** beware if you are taking a walk in rural regions of Japan and you see a beautiful woman playing a lute - she could be a *Jorōgumo*. Once you have been enticed into a shack by her beauty and by the soothing song, she will turn into a spider, bind you in silk and devour you entirely. In some stories, the woman even carries a bundle that initially appears to be a baby, but on closer inspection is actually a spider egg from which hundreds of spider children will burst before feeding on your succulent flesh.
32. **Kitsune:** commonly spoken of in Japanese folklore, Kitsune are essentially foxes that can take human form. Divided into two types - *zenko* (benevolent spirits) and *yako* (those that are mischievous and malicious), all Kitsune are said to be highly intelligent and possess magical powers. The older and more powerful a Kitsune becomes, the more tails it grows - up to a maximum of nine, at which point its fur becomes white or gold and it gains the ability to see or hear anything that is happening anywhere in the entire world. Before transforming into a human, the Kitsune must place a reed or broad leaf on its head, and even after transformation the spirit may not be able to shed its tail - spotting this should a Kitsune get drunk or careless is a common way to discern its true nature.
33. **Longma:** in Chinese mythology, the Longma was a winged horse covered with Dragon scales. The word itself means Dragon (long) horse (ma). If a Longma was seen, most people believed it was an omen that a great and wise ruler would soon come to power.

34. **Ahool:** in the deepest rainforests of Java lives a giant bat with a wingspan of over three metres. Covered in grey fur and with large claws on its forearms, some even believe this creature - the Ahool - to resemble a pterosaur.
35. **Uchchaihshravas:** snow white in colour, Uchchaihshravas is a seven-headed horse in Hindu mythology that possesses the ability of flight. Although some tales tell of this kind of horses being a vehicle of *Indra* (the god-king of heaven), others state that it is in fact the horse of *Bali*, king of demons.
36. **Baku:** possessing an elephant's trunk, an ox's tail, a tiger's paws and the eyes of a rhinoceros, the Baku devours dreams and thus prevents one from having nightmares. In more recent years, naturalists have noted the similarity between the description of the Baku and real-world animal the tapir.
37. **Jiangshi:** a truly terrifying creature, the Jiangshi is a stiff human corpse dressed in the official garments of the Qing dynasty. Always with its arms outstretched, this zombie moves by hopping, seeking out living creatures at night and devouring their life-force. During the day, the Jiangshi rests in either a coffin or in a dark, dank cave. Some Jiangshi look almost like you or I (as they are the corpse of the recently deceased), whereas others (who have been decomposing for some time) have rotting flesh hanging off their yellowing bones.
38. **Yamata no Orochi:** with eight heads and eight tails, the Japanese Dragon Yamata no Orochi was slain by *Susanoo*, the storm god of Shinto legend; the beast had lived in the Hii river in Izumo Province, and every year had demanded (and received) the sacrifice of a daughter of two earthly deities.