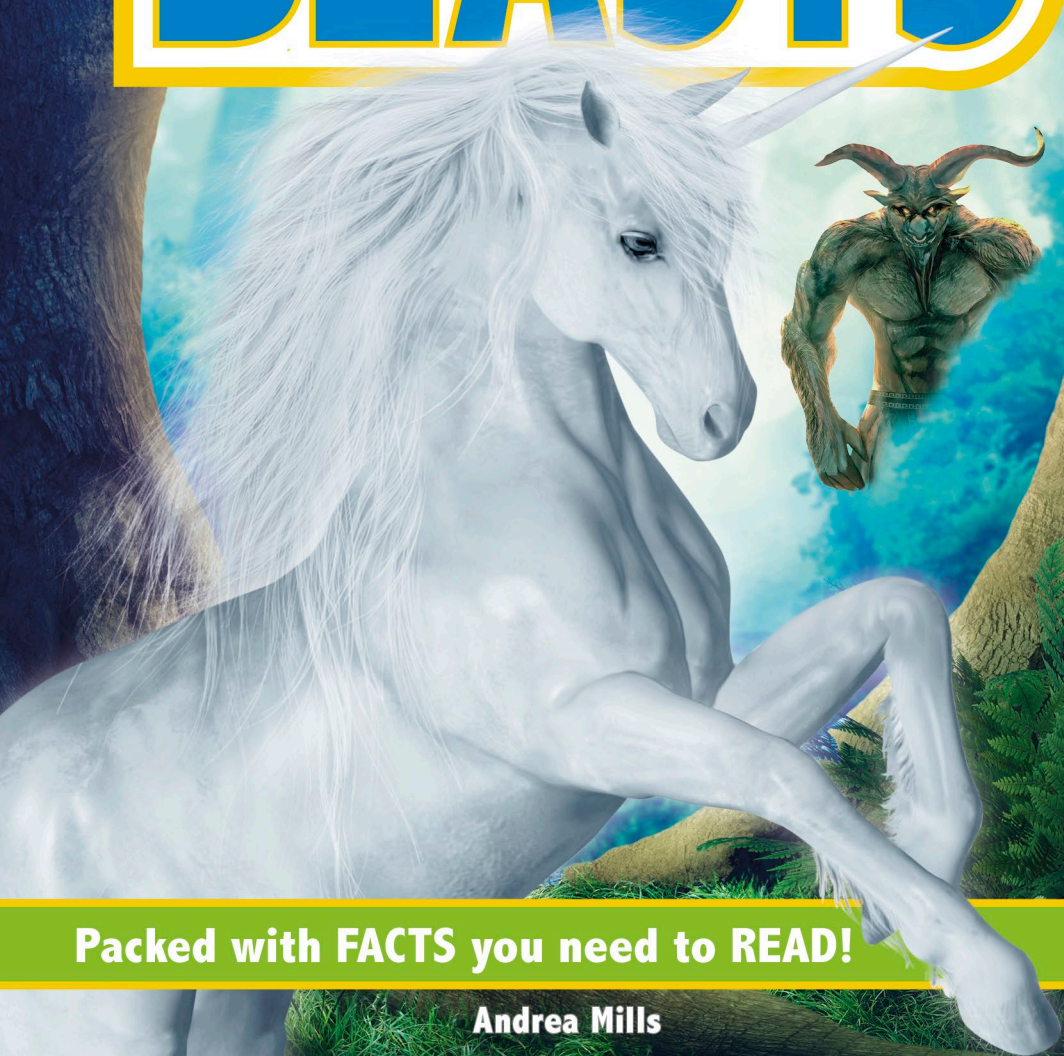


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MYTHICAL BEASTS



Packed with **FACTS** you need to **READ!**

Andrea Mills

Mythical Beasts

By Andrea Mills





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Contents

- 4 Introduction
- 6 Chapter 1: Meet the Monsters
- 14 *Monsters Map*
- 16 Chapter 2: Flying Fiends
- 22 *Dragons*
- 24 Chapter 3: Earthy Creatures
- 32 *Local Legends*
- 34 Chapter 4: Water Wonders
- 44 *Spectacular Sea Creatures*
- 46 Chapter 5: Super Shapeshifters
- 56 *Total Tricksters*
- 58 Quiz
- 60 Glossary
- 62 Index





Myth means tale or story. It comes from the Greek word “mythos.” People have shared stories about mighty monsters and bizarre beasts since ancient times. These tales help people understand themselves and the world around them.

Myths have been retold over the years in art and music, as well as in stories. With each retelling, the content and creatures may change. As people move around, their myths and stories travel with them. This makes it very difficult to track where myths originally came from.



Turn the page and get ready to meet beautiful beasts, sneaky shapeshifters, and creepy critters. They are the things that legends are made of!

Ancient Greek pots decorated with images of mythical creatures.





Chapter 1

Meet the Monsters

The most important creature in ancient Chinese mythology is Pan Gu. Born from a cosmic (space) egg, he had horns, tusks, and a hairy body. As the first living being, Pan Gu got to work creating the universe. He pushed the sky away from the earth by growing ten feet taller every day for 18,000 years. When Pan Gu died, his hair became the stars, his eyes became the sun and moon and his body parts were transformed into the rest of the universe.

Pan Gu was a believer in the two forces of yin and yang. These forces must be balanced for people to live in harmony.

A mural of Pan Gu
from a temple
in China.



Enormous giants were the first beings on Earth in many cultures. The frost giant Ymir [ee-MEER] was the first in Norse (Viking) mythology.

The Norse world formed when fire and ice collided. This made the ice melt into water, creating Ymir. As more giants appeared, the gods grew scared of them. Ymir was killed and the gods used his body parts to make the landscape.

Ymir, the first being, was the father of all giants.



His hair became trees, his skull the sky,
and his brain formed clouds. His bones
made mountains and his blood flowed as
seas. A wall between the gods and giants
was built from Ymir's huge eyebrows.



A fantastic, flapping firebird called a phoenix is featured in the legends of ancient Greece and Egypt. The song of the phoenix was so beautiful that the sun god would stop his chariot just to listen to it.

Toward the end of its life, the phoenix was thought to build a special nest. It set the nest on fire before being reborn from the ashes. The new phoenix flew up to the sky to give the gift of an egg to the sun god. This magical bird is a symbol of long life, rebirth, and eternal hope.





It is believed that phoenixes can live for up to 500 years.

Beware the grotesque Gorgons!
Anyone who stares at these scary
snake-haired sisters will be instantly
turned to stone.

These ancient Greek women had
vast wings, sharp fangs, and scaly
skin. The most famous sister was
Medusa. She was cursed with
slithering snakes on her head after
claiming her hair was more beautiful
than a goddess's. Medusa met a
dire end when the Greek warrior
Perseus set out to slay her. Using

a bronze shield as a
reflective mirror
to avoid her gaze,
Perseus cut off
Medusa's head.
He became a hero.



Bronze shield





Medusa was the only Gorgon
who could be killed.

Monsters Map

Planet Earth has always been a monster's playground. Be brave as you travel far and wide to trace the origins of these memorable monsters!



Ymir—Scandinavia
(see pp.8–9)

NORTH
AMERICA

Ninki Nanka—
Gambia

This swamp monster
has the body of a
crocodile with
a giraffe's neck
and a horse's head.

SOUTH
AMERICA

El Chupacabra—Puerto Rico
This monster is a mix of lizard
and coyote. Its legend grew
from stories of beasts in
Mexico and the USA.

Cerberus—Greece

Known as the hound of Hades, this three-headed dog stood guard outside the Underworld to keep the dead from escaping.



Ushi-oni—Japan

The water-dwelling Ushi-oni has an ox's head. Its body is made of parts from different animals, including a spider, cat, and crab.



EUROPE

Medusa—Greece
(see pp.12–13)

ASIA

Pan Gu—China
(see pp.6–7)

Phoenix—Egypt and Greece
(see pp.10–11)

Yara-ma-yha-who—
Australia

The yara-ma-yha-who is small in size and has suckers for fingers. Its skin is bright red.

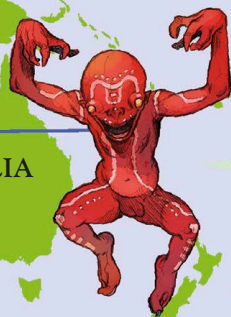
AFRICA



Garuda—India

The king of the birds has an eagle's head, wings, and claws, with a human body. He punishes wrong-doers by eating them.

AUSTRALIA





Chapter 2

Flying Fiends

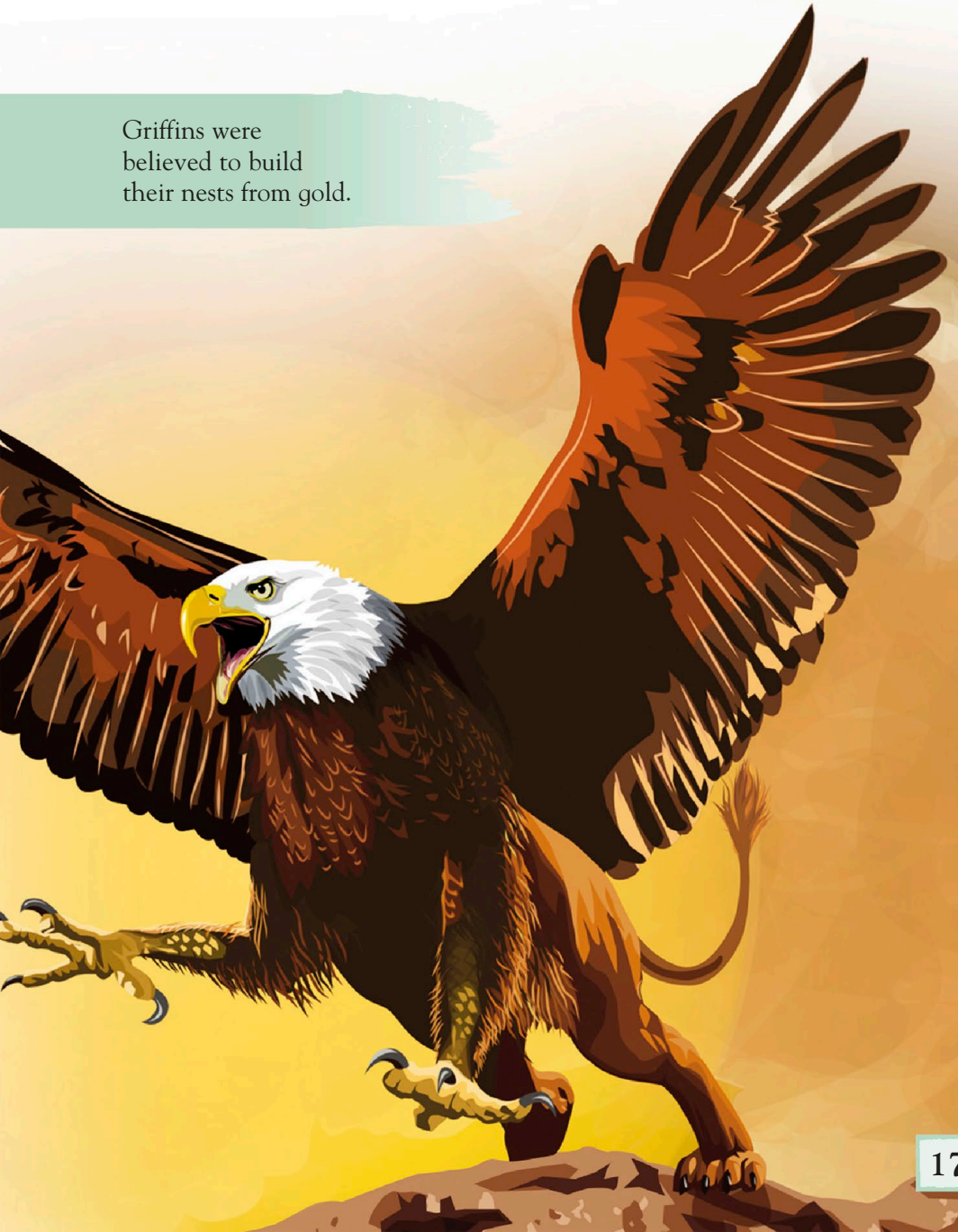
The great griffin is part of mythology across Europe, Asia, and beyond. It has the beak and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.

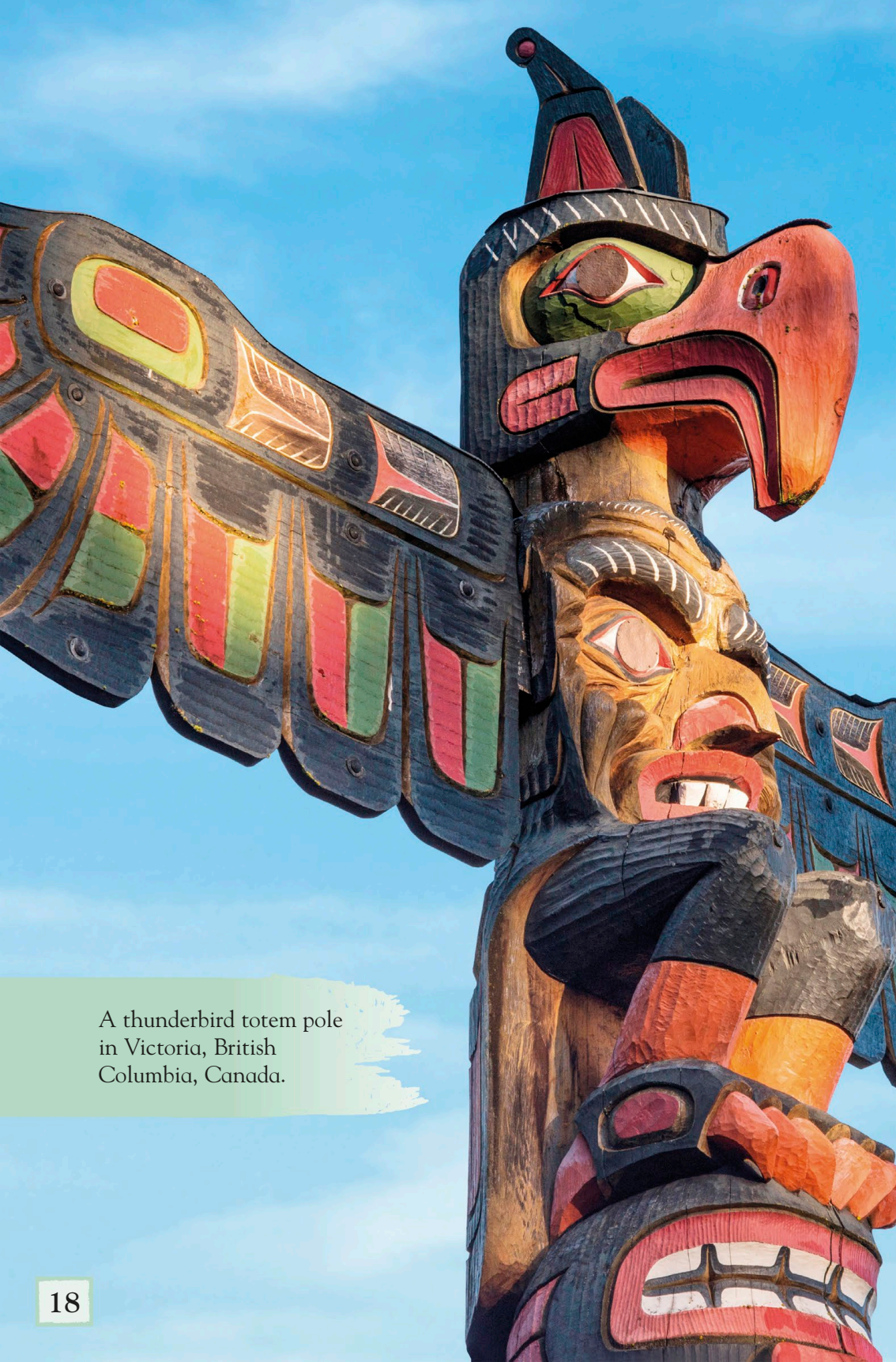
Griffins were considered the most majestic mix of creatures. With super strength, they have been described as more powerful than 12 eagles and more dangerous than a pride of lions. Griffins were strong enough to snatch up horses and their riders in their talons. They were also guardians, trusted to protect gold and other treasures.



Their strength and leadership meant they were pictured on the shields of medieval knights.

Griffins were believed to build their nests from gold.





A thunderbird totem pole
in Victoria, British
Columbia, Canada.

Native American tribes tell tales of the Thunderbird. They celebrate it in carvings and totem poles. However, sightings and stories of the Thunderbird have always struck fear into human hearts.

When this monstrous bird took flight the sky would fill with thunderstorms. Thunderclaps came from each flap of its wings and lightning strikes from each blink of its eyes. The Thunderbird was so large that it could grab whales out of the ocean and carry them away to eat.





Arabian legends tell of a winged terror called the Roc. It features in a classic Arabian story, *One Thousand and One Nights*. It also appears in the traveler's tales of Italian adventurer Marco Polo.



According to one story, this eagle-like bird could even carry off elephants.

Seeing the Roc meant a failed harvest or bloody battle was on the way. The Roc had a huge hunger to match its size. It could grab its prey in its enormous claws. Rocs were thought to be able to snatch whole ships from the sea.



Dragons

The history of dragons is a tale of two continents. Flying, fire-breathing dragons were feared in Europe. Slinky, serpentlike dragons were thought to be lucky in Asia.

Kuh Billaur

In ancient Persia, there was an evil dragon called Kuh Billaur. He was killed by the sword of the hero, Ali.



Gargoyle

Instead of fire, French dragons, called gargoyles, squirted water. Gargoyle sculptures were put on buildings to scare away enemies.

Ryu

This snakelike dragon hid beneath the ocean in Japan. He created terrible storms. However, those who faced the creature would have their wishes granted.



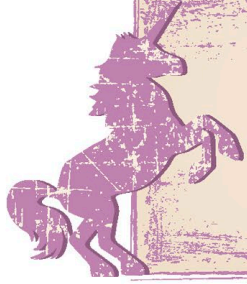
Fafnir

In Scandinavian myth, a dwarf named Fafnir was turned into a fire-breathing dragon. He was killed by the dragon-slayer, Sigurd.

Komodo

The only dragon alive today is the Komodo dragon. It is the largest living lizard. Komodo dragons live in the volcanic islands of Indonesia.





Chapter 3

Earthy Creatures

An elephant never forgets, and Indian stories always remember the jumbo Airavata. This special elephant is easy to spot as it has five trunks and ten tusks. The Hindu god Brahma crowned Airavata King of the Elephants.

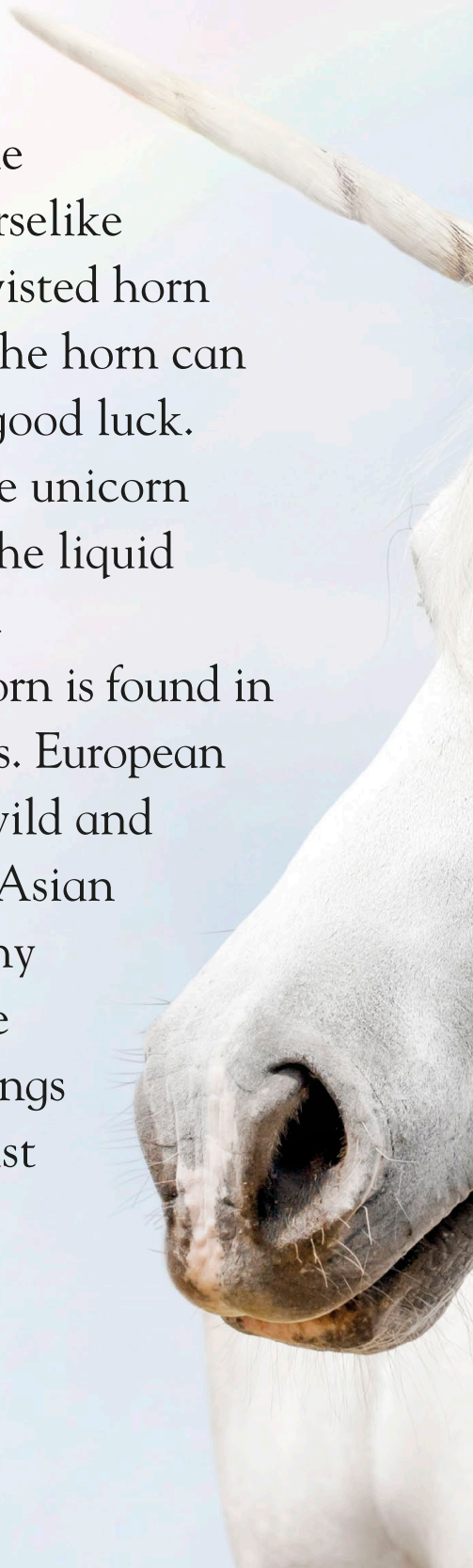
In Indian mythology, Airavata is known as “elephant of the clouds,” because he gave the world water. Airavata made rain clouds form above Earth. He sucked up water with his trunks and sprayed it into the sky.



Mural of Airavata at a temple in Thailand.

The most magical of mythical creatures is the unicorn. This white horselike creature has a single twisted horn on its head. Touching the horn can heal people and bring good luck. Legend has it that if the unicorn dips its horn in water, the liquid instantly becomes pure.

The myth of the unicorn is found in many different countries. European stories describe it as a wild and free-roaming creature. Asian tales say that it has a shy and sweet nature. Some people claim that sightings of unicorns are really just other horned animals.






Some cultures believed that unicorn horns could be used to detect poison.

The Haechi [hay-CHAI] of Korea is a monstrous mix of lion and dog. People thought that it liked to eat children! It was also thought that Haechi could swallow fire and would always punish those who did evil deeds.



Haechi has become a symbol of protection. Many buildings in Korea have statues of Haechi at their entrances. People think that the stone watchdog will protect buildings from fire and other disasters.

A close-up photograph of a stone Haechi statue, a traditional Korean stone watchdog. The statue is intricately carved with swirling patterns and a textured surface. It is positioned on a stone base. The background is a solid blue color.

A Haechi statue at the Gyeongbokgung Palace in South Korea.

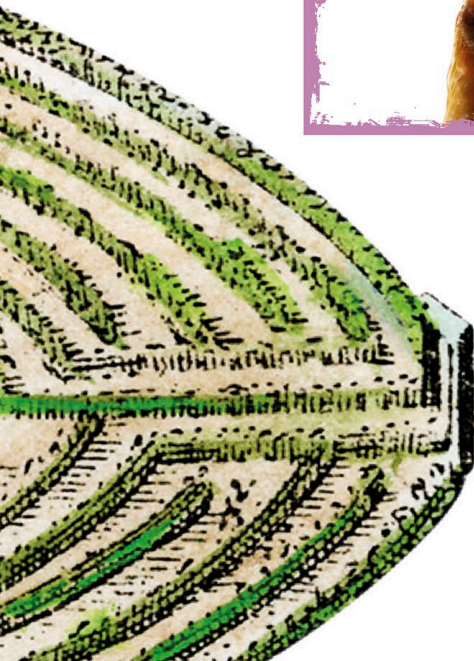
Make way for the mighty master of mazes—the Minotaur! This ancient Greek monster combined a human body with the head and tail of a bull. King Minos of Crete ordered the construction of a maze, so that the Minotaur could be locked inside, unable to escape. People were sacrificed to feed the bull-headed beast.



The Greek hero Theseus didn't agree with this and took revenge on the Minotaur. He entered the maze and killed the Minotaur in a deadly duel.



Minotaur



Theseus and the Minotaur fighting in the maze.

Local Legends

There have been many reported sightings of creatures from myths. Here are some of the most famous ones.



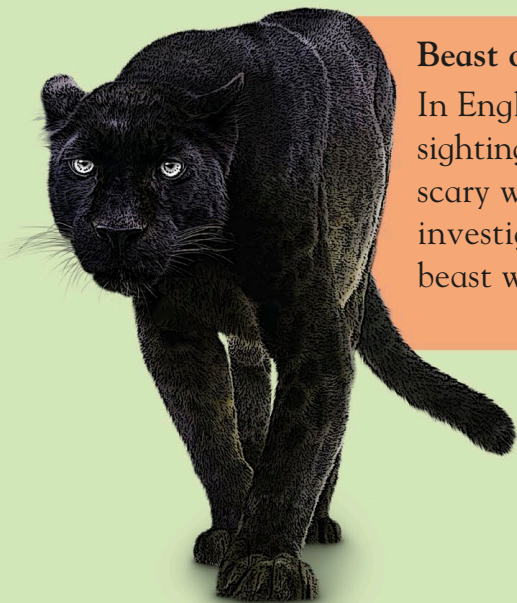
Yeti

Hairy and scary, the Yeti lives high in Asia's Himalayan Mountains. Climbers have reported seeing this apelike animal. However, its existence has never been proved.

Mothman

This flying figure haunted Point Pleasant in Virginia, USA, in the 1960s. People reported seeing a man-sized bird with devilish red eyes.





Beast of Bodmin Moor

In England in 1995 there were many sightings of a black panther with scary white eyes. The government investigated but no evidence of the beast was ever found.

Bigfoot

Bigfoot is the Yeti equivalent in North America. This forest dweller is also known by its Native American name, "sasquatch."



A footprint that is believed to be Bigfoot's was found at the Rouge National Urban Park, Canada.





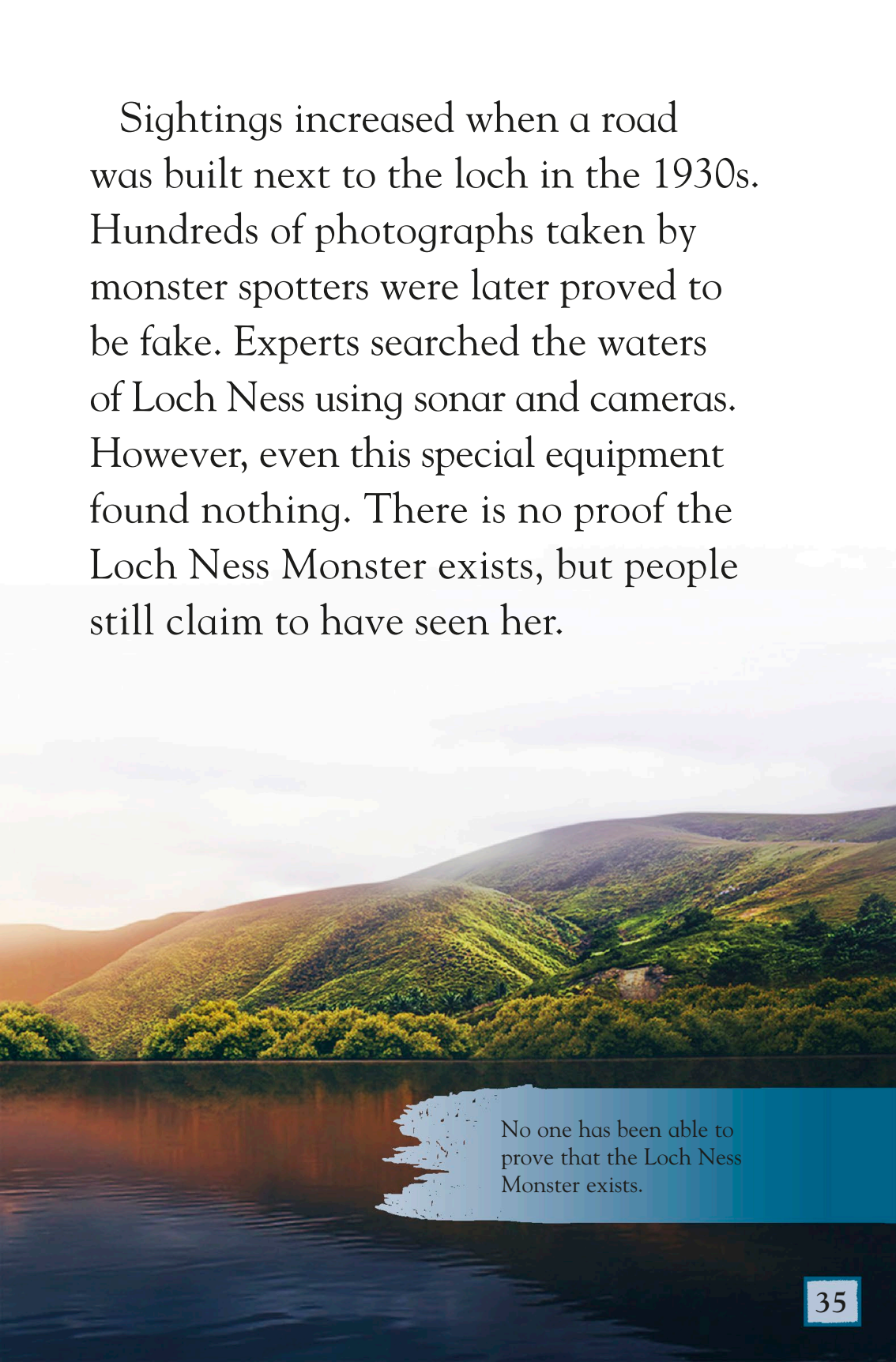
Chapter 4

Water Wonders

A Scottish lake, or loch, is home to one of the world's most famous monsters—the Loch Ness Monster. The lake is deep, dark, and mysterious, the perfect home for the shy beast. People have described it as a long-necked, dinosaur-like creature up to 30 ft (9 m) long.

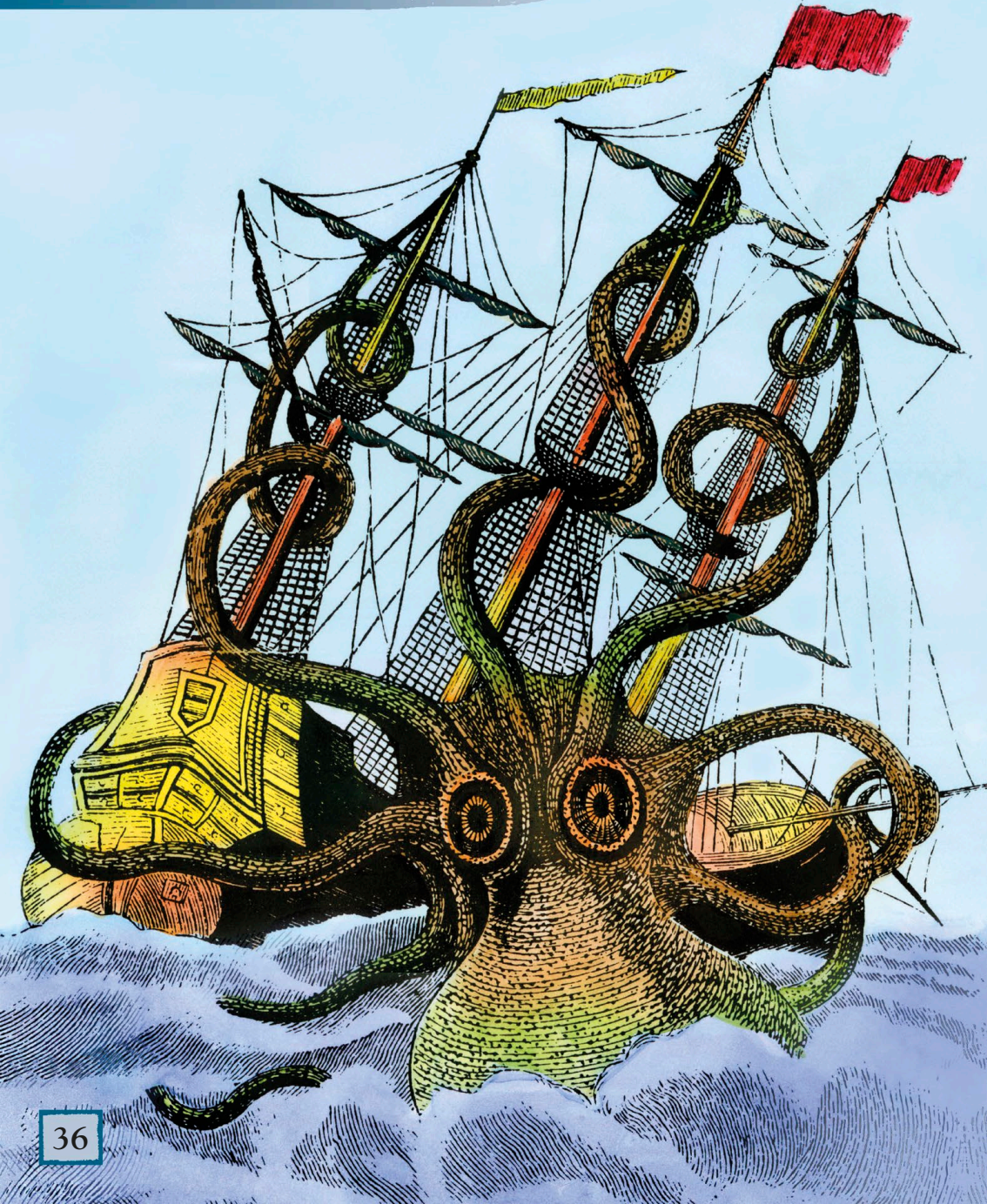


Sightings increased when a road was built next to the loch in the 1930s. Hundreds of photographs taken by monster spotters were later proved to be fake. Experts searched the waters of Loch Ness using sonar and cameras. However, even this special equipment found nothing. There is no proof the Loch Ness Monster exists, but people still claim to have seen her.



No one has been able to prove that the Loch Ness Monster exists.

The Kraken may have been a giant squid. Giant squids can grow up to 50ft (15m) long.

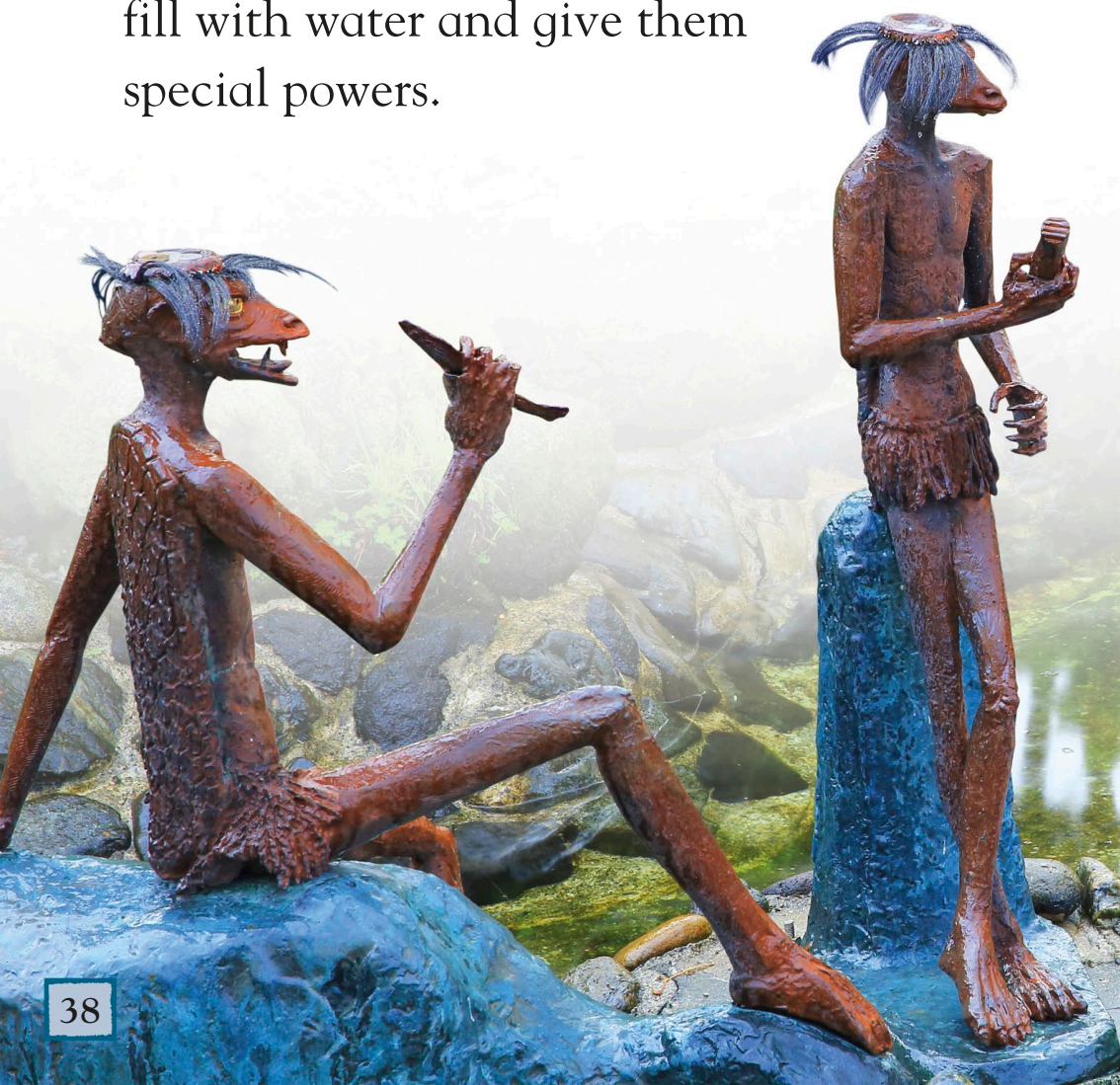


In the sea near Norway and Greenland lurks a super-sized sea monster called the Kraken. The legend goes that sailors thought the Kraken was an island. When they got closer, the Kraken grabbed hold of their ships. Whole crews were pulled underwater.

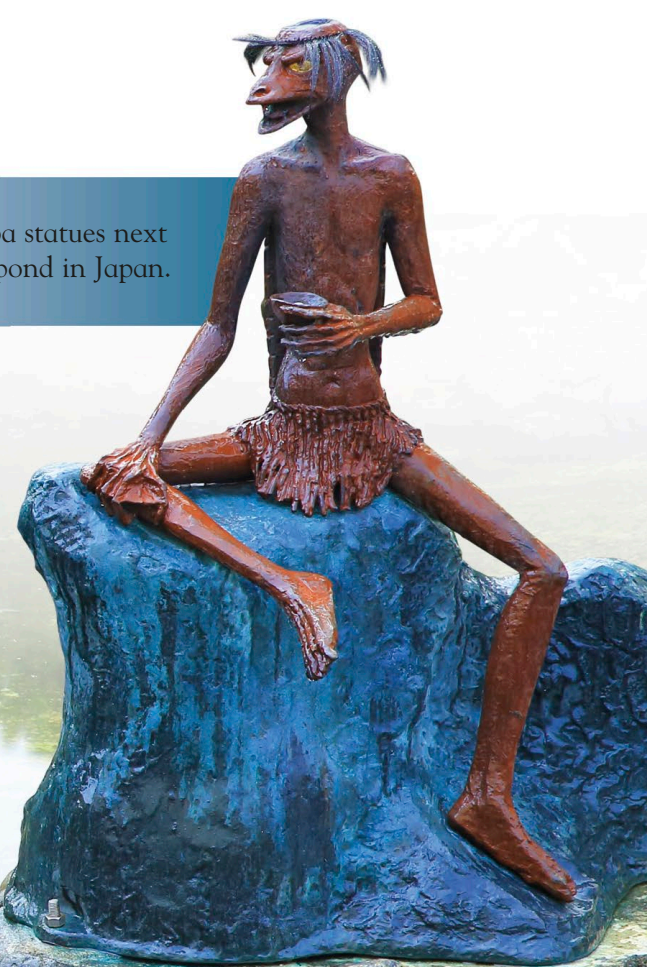
When near the surface, the Kraken was very dangerous. It could cause just as much trouble when it swam down to the seabed. It could suck the seawater down and around, causing a deadly whirlpool.

Many people say the Kraken never existed. They suggest sailors were more likely to have spotted real-life sea creatures, such as giant squid or huge octopuses.

Water demons are said to live in the depths of lakes and rivers in Japan. For centuries, kappas have hidden underwater, waiting to cause problems. Most reports describe them as scaly green imps the size of young children. Kappas' heads have dents in them, which fill with water and give them special powers.



Some people think kappas are naughty little imps playing harmless tricks. They are often described as being very polite. If you bow to them they will bow back. This makes them spill the water from their heads and lose their powers.

A bronze statue of a Kappa, a water spirit from Japanese folklore, is depicted sitting on a large, blue-painted rock. The Kappa has a long, thin neck, a flat head with a small crest, and a wide, open mouth. It is wearing a fringed loincloth and is holding a small object in its hands. The statue is positioned next to a pond, with a stone wall in the foreground. The background shows a misty, green landscape with a body of water.

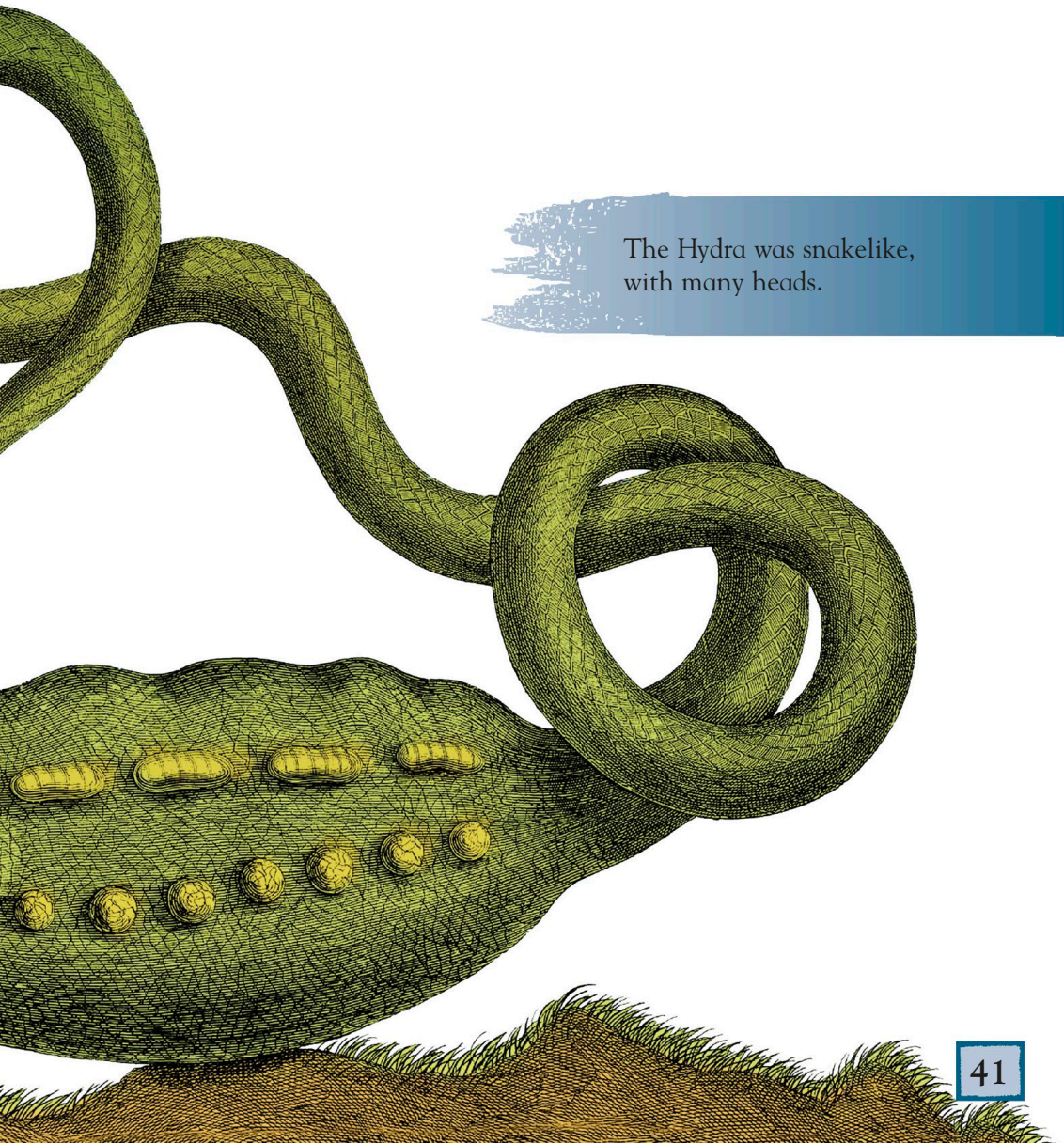
Kappa statues next to a pond in Japan.

Greek myths tell of a many-headed serpent that hid under the surface of Lake Lerna. It was called the Hydra and its foul breath polluted the water. If one of its heads was chopped off, more grew back in its place.



The Hydra was killed by a Greek hero called Hercules. This fearless warrior sliced off the Hydra's heads one at a time. He then quickly burned the necks, so no more heads could grow back.

The Hydra was snakelike, with many heads.



Throughout history, sailors have talked about creatures with the head, body, and arms of a human, and the tail of a fish. They are called mermaids and are beautiful but dangerous. They should never be approached and their sweet songs mean trouble.

People believe that mermaid's songs lead ships off-course, making them crash into rocks and sink. Seeing a mermaid means that you could drown. Mermaids are also thought to call sailors down to the bottom of the sea, never to return.



Some myths suggest that mermaids knew what would happen in the future.

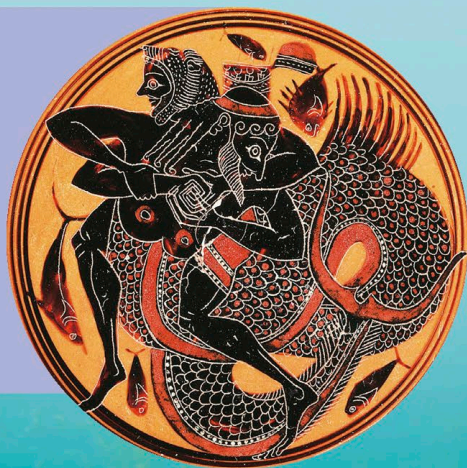


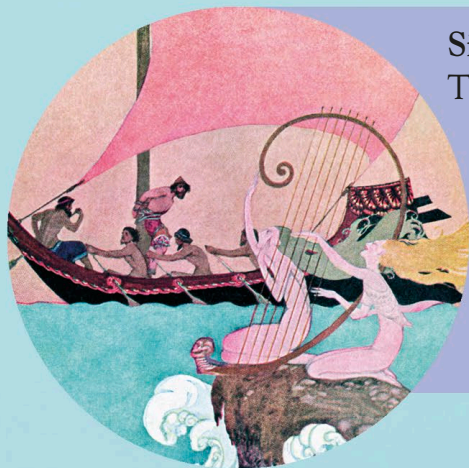
Spectacular Sea Creatures

There are many stories of sea creatures that are part human and part animal. Here are some of these creatures who like to make a splash.

Triton

Like a mermaid, Triton has a man's head, chest, and arms, with the tail of a fish. A messenger of the sea in Greek mythology, he used seahorses to travel through the waves.



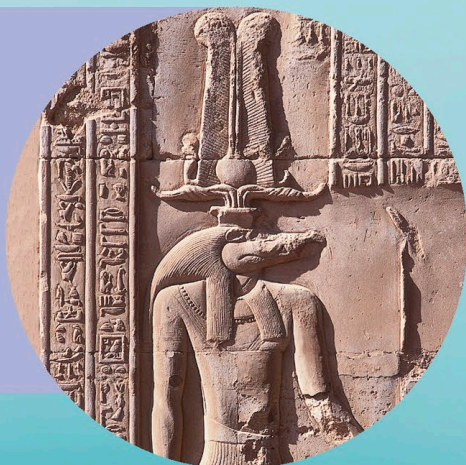


Sirens

The scariest sound in the sea is the call of the Sirens. These deadly women from Greek mythology use their magical music to lure sailors to them, then drown them underwater.

Sobek

With gigantic jaws and an appetite to match, this Egyptian god has a man's body with a crocodile's head. Ancient Egyptians worshipped him, but were also terrified of him.



Kelpie

In Celtic mythology, this water horse roams the seas of Scotland. It can also take a human form. Kelpies are devious creatures and are best avoided!





Chapter 5

Super Shapeshifters

Legend has it that some cursed people transform into terrifying wolves in the light of the full Moon. They are called werewolves and they eat humans! Werewolves are human by day but wolf by night. They can only be stopped if they are shot with a silver bullet or arrow.

Werewolf stories began in medieval times, when wolves lived in the woods near people's homes. In areas without wolves, similar stories were told about shapeshifting bears and lions.



Werewolves look like a mixture of humans and wolves.

Watch out, coyotes on the prowl!
These wild dogs stalk the plains of
North America. The trickster Coyote,
who can change into human shape,
is the hero of many tales told by
Native American people.

One story tells how Coyote was
chosen by the first humans to be
the moon. He couldn't resist spying
on the people below.

In another story, Coyote was the child
of the sun and the moon. He helped make
the animals, birds, and plants, and shape
the first people from clay. Coyote often got
into trouble by being boastful or foolish.



Real-life coyotes live all over North America.



Japanese cultures warn of big-nosed, red-faced demons called tengu. Tengu means “heavenly dog.” These semi-human creatures have all kinds of special gifts. They have super strength, magical powers, and can fly.



Tengu have red faces and birdlike features, such as feathers.

Hiding out in wooded mountainsides, tengu are very good at being bad. They use fans to make wind and fly away with people they have kidnapped. Tengu also enjoy starting arguments and making problems.





Púcas were very clever,
and known for their
naughty schemes.

Irish legends talk of little creatures called Púca, which means “goblin.” Scary Púcas are hard to spot because they can take on many different forms. Across Ireland, they are described differently. Some stories feature a golden-eyed horse. Other stories describe a goat-headed human.

Whatever shape a Púca takes, it is always best avoided. This is because the Púca brings doom and disaster.

Always up to mischief, Púcas enjoy telling stories and will often bend the truth. They enjoy talking with humans that they meet. However, their words can't always be trusted!

The most famous shapeshifter is the vampire. This monster can appear as a person with sharp fangs, a flying bat, or a chilling mist. Vampires bite people's necks and drink their blood. The ancient vampire Prince Vlad of Romania enjoyed putting human heads on sticks outside his creepy castle.

Bran Castle in Transylvania, Romania, is also called "Dracula's Castle."





In 1897 Bram Stoker made vampires famous with his book *Dracula*. The story tells of a creepy count who lives in a castle in Transylvania.

There are a few things that vampires are scared of. These are mirrors, garlic, and sunlight. A wooden spike through the heart is the best way to make sure that a vampire won't rise again.

Total Tricksters

Tricksters are mythical masters of mischief and mayhem. They all share a naughty streak and can bring a touch of comedy to ancient legends and folklore.

Anansi



The Ashanti people of West Africa tell tales about the spider trickster, Anansi. He is very clever and cunning.

Hare



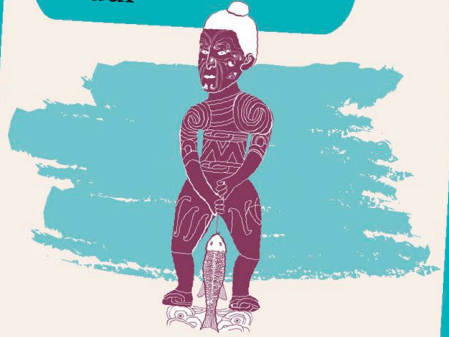
This trickster is known in the USA as Brer Rabbit. He is quick-thinking and good at outsmarting other creatures.

Raven



In Native American legends, this busy bird enjoys planning pranks. He is famous for hanging the sun and moon in the sky.

Maui



Known as Maui-of-a-thousand-tricks, Polynesian hero Maui is a fisherman. His best catch is the North Island of New Zealand!

Bes



Egyptian entertainment came from this cheeky little god. Bes always stuck out his tongue when faced with danger.

Eshu



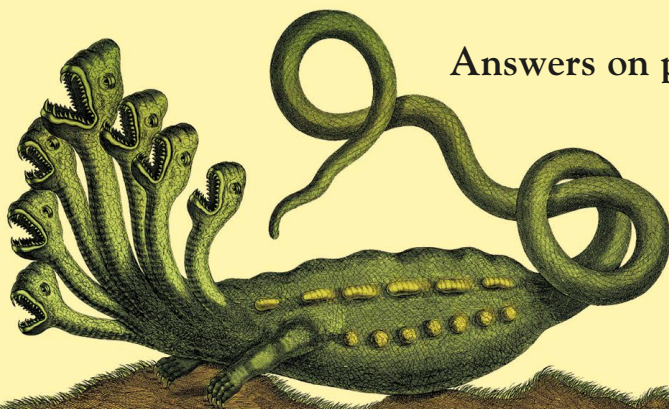
Tricky to spot, West African mischief-maker Eshu could appear as anything from a giant to a tiny boy.

Quiz

- 1 In Norse mythology, what was used to build the wall between the gods and the giants?
- 2 What gift did the phoenix give to the sun god?
- 3 Which classic Arabian story features the Roc?
- 4 In Indian mythology, what is Airavata known as?
- 5 Which mythical beast stands guard outside buildings in Korea?
- 6 Which creature's head does a Minotaur have?

- 7 What will a kappa do if you bow to it?
- 8 What happens if you stare at a Gorgon?
- 9 What does Tengu mean?
- 10 Where would you find El Chupacabra?
- 11 Which Egyptian god has a man's body and a crocodile's head?
- 12 What is the name of the spider trickster from West Africa?

Answers on page 61



Glossary

Continent

large area of land that has many countries on it, for example, Asia or Europe

Duel

fight or conflict between two people or groups

Equivalent

when two things are equal

Grotesque

something that is so unpleasant it becomes shocking or upsetting

Loch

large area of water in Scotland

Majestic

beautiful or impressive

Medieval

from or relating to the Middle Ages, a time in European history between the years of 600 and 1500

Polynesian

from or relating to Polynesia, a group of islands in the Southern Pacific Ocean

Sacrifice

give something or someone as an offering in exchange for something else

Salamander

an animal that lives both on land and in water

Scandinavia

area of land in Northern Europe that includes Norway and Sweden

Slay

kill

Sonar

piece of equipment that can calculate the position of something underwater using sound waves

Tusks

long teeth that grow from the jaws of animals

Underworld

place that some myths say is where people go after they die

Answers to the quiz:

1. Ymir's eyebrows;
2. An egg;
3. *One Thousand and One Nights*;
4. Elephant of the Clouds;
5. Haechi;
6. A bull's head;
7. It will bow back;
8. You will turn to stone;
9. Heavenly dog;
10. In Puerto Rico;
11. Sobek;
12. Anansi

Index

- Airavata 24–25
Ali 22
Anansi 56
Beast of Bodmin Moor 33
Bes 57
Bigfoot 33
Brahma 24
Brer Rabbit 56
Cerberus 15
Coyote 48–49
Dracula 55
dragons 22–23
El Chupacabra 14
Eshu 57
Fafnir 23
gargoyles 22
Garuda 15
Gorgons 12–13
griffins 16–17
Haechi 28–29
Hercules 41
Hydra 40–41
kappas 38–39
Kelpie 45
Komodo dragons 23
Kraken 36–37
Kuh Billaur 22
Loch Ness Monster 34–35
Maui 57
Medusa 12, 15
mermaids 42–43
Minotaur 30–31

Mothman 32

myths 4

Ninki Nanka 14

Pan Gu 6–7, 15

Perseus 12

phoenixes 10–11, 15

Púca 52–53

ravens 57

Roc 20–21

Ryu 23

Sigurd 23

Sirens 45

Sobek 45

tengu 50–51

Theseus 31

Thunderbird 18–19

totem poles 18, 19

Triton 44

unicorns 26–27

Ushi-oni 15

vampires 54–55

werewolves 46–47

Yara-ma-yha-who 15

Yeti 32

Ymir 8–9, 14



A LEVEL FOR EVERY READER

This book is a part of an exciting four-level reading series to support children in developing the habit of reading widely for both pleasure and information. Each book is designed to develop a child's reading skills, fluency, grammar awareness, and comprehension in order to build confidence and enjoyment when reading.

Ready for a Level 3 (Beginning to Read Alone) book

A child should:

- be able to read many words without needing to stop and break them down into sound parts.
- read smoothly, in phrases and with expression, and at a good pace.
- self-correct when a word or sentence doesn't sound right or doesn't make sense.

A valuable and shared reading experience

For many children, reading requires much effort but adult participation can make reading both fun and easier. Here are a few tips on how to use this book with a young reader:

Check out the contents together:

- read about the book on the back cover and talk about the contents page to help heighten interest and expectation.
- ask the reader to make predictions about what they think will happen next.
- talk about the information he/she might want to find out.

Encourage fluent reading:

- encourage reading aloud in fluent, expressive phrases, making full use of punctuation and thinking about the meaning; if helpful, choose a sentence to read aloud to help demonstrate reading with expression.

Praise, share, and talk:

- notice if the reader is responding to the text by self-correcting and varying his/her voice.
- encourage the reader to recall specific details after each chapter.
- let her/him pick out interesting words and discuss what they mean.
- talk about what he/she found most interesting or important and show your own enthusiasm for the book.
- read the quiz at the end of the book and encourage the reader to answer the questions, if necessary, by turning back to the relevant pages to find the answers.

Series consultant, Dr. Linda Gambrell, Emerita Distinguished Professor of Education at Clemson University, has served as President of the National Reading Conference, the College Reading Association, and the International Reading Association.

LEARN TO READ, THEN READ TO LEARN!

Engaging topics and fun, interactive pages build reading skills • Developed in consultation with leading literacy experts • Helps build a lifelong love of reading

A level for every reader



LEARNING
TO READ



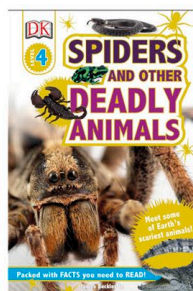
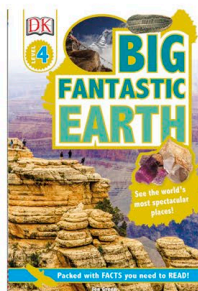
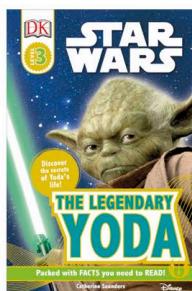
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