

Three Mythical Monsters

The Kraken

In Scandinavian legends, there are giant sea monsters living off of the coast of Norway called kraken. Those legends say that kraken are the size of small islands and can drag even the largest wooden ships to the bottom of the ocean.

In 1753, Erik Pontoppidan, who was a bishop in Norway, described the kraken in detail in his book, *The Natural History of Norway*.

According to Pontoppidan, Kraken attract great schools of fish around them. These fish feed off the krakens' excrement. And so, if you believe the legends, fishing is supposed to be excellent around a kraken as long as you do not wake the kraken. In fact, Norwegian fishermen used to say that 'you must have fished over a kraken' if the catch was particularly good.

There is some debate as to what a kraken looks like. According to Pontoppidan, kraken are crab-like fish or whales. In popular culture, the kraken is portrayed as a giant squid or a giant octopus. In the movie, *Pirates of the Caribbean* for example, the Kraken is a giant octopus controlled by Davy Jones.

The Basilisk

According to ancient myths, the basilisk is the king of serpents. It also the most deadly. It can kill a person with a single glance.

There are many descriptions of basilisks by ancient writers. According to some of these writers, a basilisk is a rooster with a serpent's tail. Other writers say it is a giant snake. In some legends, a basilisk comes from a serpent's egg that is hatched by a rooster. In others, it is a roosters egg hatched by a toad.

It was a fearful creature that was hard to kill. However, ancient and medieval writers tell us that the basilisk can be killed by a weasel. Supposedly, the weasel is immune to its glance. Some writers also say that the basilisk can be killed by looking in a mirror.

Once killed, the basilisk is a useful creature. According to some stories, its ashes can be used to turn silver into gold. Other writers say that the dead body of a basilisk will keep away spiders.

The Kraken

- (1) According to Scandinavian legends, what lives off of the coast of Norway?
- (2) How big are kraken?
- (3) What can kraken do to even the largest wooden ships?
- (4) In what year did Erik Pontoppidan write his book?
- (5) What was the book called?
- (6) What lives around kraken?
- (7) What do the fish eat?
- (8) How is the fishing around a kraken?
- (9) What did Norwegian fishermen say if they had a good catch?
- (10) According to Pontopiddan, what does a kraken look like?
- (11) According to popular culture, what does a kraken look like?
- (12) What movie does the article mention?

The Basilisk

- (1) What is a basilisk?
- (2) Is the basilisk harmless?
- (3) How can it kill a person?
- (4) What does a basilisk look like?
 - (a)
 - (b)
- (5) How is a basilisk born?
 - (a)
 - (b)
- (6) How can a basilisk be killed?
 - (a)
 - (b)
- (7) How come a weasel can kill a basilisk?
- (8) Why is a dead basilisk useful?
 - (a)
 - (b)

The Sphinx

The sphinx is a mythological creature that originates in ancient Egypt. There are many descriptions of sphinxes. Some have the body of a lion with the head of a human. Some have the body of a lion with the head of a ram. And some have the body of a lion with the head of a hawk or falcon.

There are many statues of sphinxes in Egypt standing guard. The most famous of these is the Great Sphinx of Giza, which was built around 2500 BC.

The Greeks imported the sphinx into their mythology as well. In Greek myths, the Sphinx was a nasty winged lion with the head of a woman. The sphinx was a demon of bad luck and destruction.

In one Greek story, the sphinx besieged the city of Thebes. The sphinx stopped all travelers going into the city and asked them a riddle. If the traveler couldn't answer the riddle then she devoured them.

The Sphinx

(1) Where did the sphinx originate?

(2) What are three descriptions of a sphinx?

(a)

(b)

(c)

(3) What do sphinx statues do?

(4) What is the most famous sphinx?

(5) When was it built?

(6) What was a sphinx in Greek mythology?

(7) What kind of demon was the sphinx?

(8) What city did the sphinx besiege?

(9) What did the sphinx do to travelers?

(10) What did the sphinx do if the traveler couldn't answer the riddle?

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