

MYTHICAL MARVELS

Dive into the depths of imagination and explore the symbolic significance of mythical beings, from the powerful dragon to the regal phoenix, that have captivated the human psyche throughout history.

Within ancient manuscripts and tales passed through generations, numerous mythical beings spring forth from human ingenuity and the enigmas of the natural world.

These exceptional legendary creatures, primarily dwelling in mythology, legends, folklores and traditions across global cultures, possess extraordinary abilities, supernatural powers and distinctive physical traits or symbolic significance.

From majestic flying entities representing purity, immortality and enchantment to formidable guardians safeguarding treasures and intriguing half-human, half-animal entities embodying dual human natures, these splendid beings have enthralled our collective consciousness, playing vital roles in the narratives, beliefs and cultural identities of diverse societies.

What sustains our enduring

fascination with these mythical beings? Are they merely products of imagination and symbolic mirrors reflecting our fears and desires, or might there be a kernel of truth concealed within these legends?

The origins of mythical animals can be traced back through history and across diverse cultures worldwide. Many mythical creatures arose from ancient observations of the natural world, where unusual animal behaviours or fossil discoveries likely inspired fantastical legends and myths. The ancient Greeks may have conceptualised creatures like the griffin and phoenix based on encounters with unfamiliar wildlife or paleontological findings. Mythical animals also serve important symbolic purposes, embodying cultural values, beliefs, aspirations and explanations for cosmic mysteries or human experiences. Dragons, for instance, often represent power

and creation but also chaos and destruction. Literature, art and oral storytelling traditions have further reinterpreted mythical creatures into epic folktales and narratives passed down through generations.

Encounters with distant, unfamiliar lands brought back wondrous tales of exotic creatures and strange phenomena, which contributed to the proliferation of mythical legends globally. Explorers returning with accounts of unfamiliar wildlife inspired imaginative stories, while fossils of extinct species unearthed in ancient times likely contributed to mythical imaginings. The interpretation of natural phenomena, such as eclipses, earthquakes or auroras, also potentially fed mythical speculations about cosmic events or fantastical creatures.

Importantly, spiritual and religious beliefs have intrinsically intertwined mythical animals with



1

DRAGON

Origin:

Found in many cultures worldwide, including European, Asian and Middle Eastern mythologies.

Symbolism:

Power, wisdom, guardians and adversaries.

Dragons, universally iconic mythical beings, command attention with their colossal presence. Characterised by a serpentine and reptilian demeanour, these creatures differ markedly between Western and Eastern cultures.

In the West, dragons adopt a malevolent role, featuring wings, horns and the ability to breathe fire, often guarding treasures or wreaking havoc. Legendary Western tales frequently centre on heroic quests to slay these formidable creatures.

Meanwhile, in Eastern cultures like China and Japan, dragons take on a wingless, four-legged form, embodying auspicious and benevolent qualities associated with good fortune. Remarkably, the dragon stands as the lone mythical entity in the Chinese zodiac, a symbol of distinction.

divine forces, cosmic symbols and objects of worship and reverence. Mythical animals serve as guardians, messengers or representations of gods across belief systems. Revered creatures like the phoenix represent renewal and rebirth, while fearsome beasts such as dragons symbolise the cosmic struggle between order and chaos. The mystical qualities of mythical animals made them vessels for cultural values and tools for explaining the unknowable mysteries of the universe.

Indeed, mythical animals have permeated various cultures throughout history and continue to resonate with human imagination—from the Western legendary creatures to the majestic beasts of the East. In this compilation, we highlight ten of the most enduring mythical animals of all time.

2

PHOENIX

Origin:

Greek and Egyptian mythology

Symbolism:

Renewal, rebirth and immortality

The majestic phoenix, renowned for its mythical ability to rise anew from its ashes, holds a prominent place in legend. The Egyptian iteration of this splendid bird is described as eagle-sized, adorned with resplendent scarlet and gold plumage, and emitting a melodious cry.

Only one phoenix lived at a time and had a long lifespan. As it approaches its end, the magnificent creature undergoes a transformative process, igniting itself in flames upon death. From these ashes, it undergoes a miraculous rebirth, emerging once again in all its glory.

This cyclical regeneration has cemented the phoenix's reputation as a symbol of renewal and resilience in the realm of myth.



FEATURE



3

UNICORN

Origin:
European folklore

Symbolism:
Purity and enchantment

A mystical creature resembling a horse, the unicorn is characterised by a single, spiralled horn projecting from its forehead. Universally regarded as symbols of purity, innocence and magic, unicorns have enchanted the imaginations of diverse cultures.

Frequently featured in fantasy literature, they evoke a sense of enchantment. The unicorn's horn, known as the alicorn, is associated with magical properties and is believed to purify water and heal ailments.

This captivating creature has transcended folklore, becoming a timeless emblem of mythical grace and benevolence, weaving its way through the fabric of cultural narratives and leaving an enduring mark on the world of fantastical tales.

4

GRIFFIN

Origin:
Ancient Greek and Persian mythologies

Symbolism:
Guardian of treasures and sacred places

Combining the regal features of a lion's body with the majestic head and wings of an eagle, griffins embody strength, courage and grandeur. Mythology often depicts them as formidable guardians, entrusted with the protection of treasures and sacred locales.

Revered for their vigilant and courageous nature, griffins symbolise not only strength but also act as powerful safeguards against malevolence. Their portrayal extends beyond myth, becoming a timeless emblem of fortitude and watchfulness.

As symbols of courage, griffins resonate across cultures, leaving an indelible mark as revered mythical beings and embodying a fusion of noble qualities that transcend time and cultural boundaries.



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5

KRAKEN

Origin:
Scandinavian folklores

Symbolism:
Mysteries of the deep sea

The Kraken, a mythical sea monster, is frequently portrayed as a colossal octopus or squid, wielding destructive powers capable of capsizing ships and ensnaring sailors in the ocean's abyss. Residing in the ocean's depths, the Kraken emerges with ominous intent, targeting ships and their crews. Its legend weaves tales of immense destruction, creating an aura of fear and fascination.

As a maritime menace, the Kraken symbolises the perilous unknown that haunts seafarers' imaginations, adding a mythical layer to the vast expanses of the ocean. The Kraken's enduring legend continues to evoke a sense of awe and trepidation in maritime folklore.

MERMAID

Origin:

Greek mythology and European folklore

Symbolism:

Life and fertility

Mermaids, ethereal beings with the upper torso of a female human melding seamlessly into a fish's tail, are synonymous with beauty, seduction and enchantment. For centuries, these aquatic creatures have graced the folklore of diverse cultures across the globe.

Renowned for their enchanting voices and captivating appearances, mermaids are often depicted as enchantresses capable of luring sailors into the depths with their irresistible charms.

Their mystique, entrenched in maritime legends, paints them as beguiling sirens, embodying both peril and allure. Across cultures, the enduring fascination with mermaids persists, their tales resonating as timeless expressions of the captivating mysteries that lie beneath the waves.

6



Image Courtesy of Pexels

7

CERBERUS

Origin:

Greek mythology

Symbolism:

Guardian of Hades



Image Courtesy of WikiCommons

Cerberus, a formidable three-headed dog, stands sentinel at the entrance to the underworld in Greek mythology, earning the title of the hound of Hades. Its solemn duty is to bar the living from entering the realm of the dead and to guarantee that once souls traverse the threshold, escape becomes impossible.

This fearsome guardian, with heads poised to deter any intruders, epitomises the boundary between the mortal and the afterlife, embodying the relentless vigilance required to maintain order in the diverse worlds of Greek mythological lore. Cerberus symbolises an eternal watchfulness, ensuring the separation of life and death remains steadfast.

8

CENTAUR

Origin:

Greek mythology

Symbolism:

Dualities of Human Nature

barbaric facets within human nature.

This mythical being stands as a captivating fusion of opposites, navigating between human intellect and untamed instincts. In art, literature and lore, centaurs endure as enigmatic figures, reflecting the intricate interplay between civilisation and primal instincts and offering a timeless exploration of the complex dichotomies within the human psyche.

A centaur, a hybrid with the upper body of a human seamlessly merging into the powerful lower body of a horse, finds solace in the wilderness, embodying wild, untamed nature. Frequently portrayed as skilled archers and warriors, centaurs evoke a dualistic theme, symbolising the coexistence of civilised and



Image Courtesy of Unsplash

FEATURE



9

BASILISK

Origin:
European and Middle-Eastern folklore

Symbolism:
Danger and malevolence

The basilisk, a mythical serpent famed for its lethal gaze and toxic breath, is depicted as a fearsome creature adorned with a crown-

like crest and rooster-like features. Its mere presence is a harbinger of death and destruction, embodying danger, malevolence and the profound power of fear.

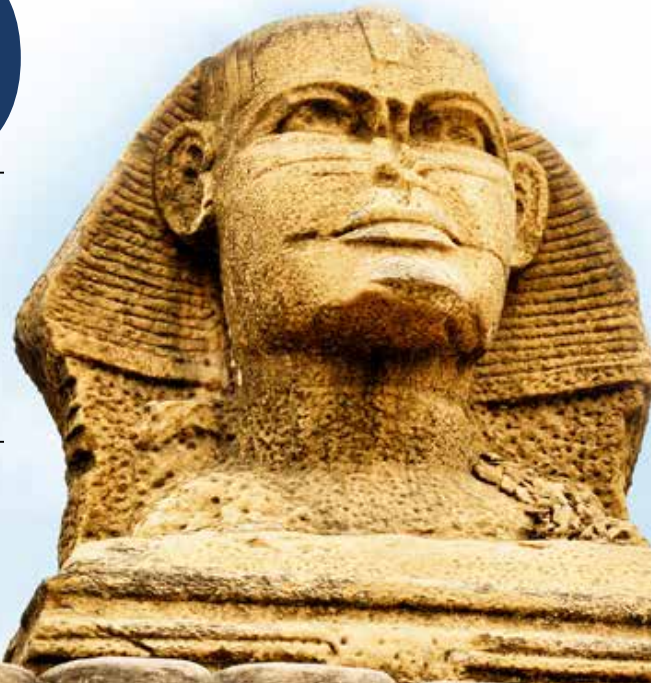
In tales and lore, the basilisk emerges as a symbol of primal terror, weaving a narrative of a creature whose very existence instills dread. This legendary serpent, with its ominous attributes, serves as a potent metaphor for the pervasive and unsettling aspects of fear, leaving an indelible mark on the rich tapestry of mythical narratives.

10

SPHINX

Origin:
Greek and Egyptian mythologies

Symbolism:
Strength, wisdom and protection



The sphinx, a colossal mythical being with a lion's body and a human head, emerges as an enigmatic riddler and divine guardian in ancient mythologies. In Greek lore, this enigmatic creature challenged travellers with riddles, devouring those who failed to answer correctly.

Meanwhile, in ancient Egyptian mythology, the Great Sphinx of Giza assumes the role of a guardian figure, safeguarding sacred sites and royal tombs with divine protective power over the pharaohs. As a symbol of wisdom and mystery, the sphinx transcends cultures, imprinting its significance on the narratives of both Greek and Egyptian civilisations.

IMAGINARY BONDS

Two individuals share their affinity with mythical animals and why they identify themselves with these magical beings.



SUVEN CHOW

Full-time mother and homemaker

"I view myself as akin to a phoenix, resonating with this majestic bird that repeatedly rises from the ashes. I experience rebirth with the arrival of each child (I have three daughters), and by expending myself daily for their sake, I am revitalised each morning to confront the world with optimism and love for

my family. However, I prefer envisioning myself as a dragon-phoenix hybrid, protective like a dragon yet extraordinary like a phoenix.

The phoenix symbolises rebirth, transformation and renewal. The depth of a mother's daily struggles for her family is incomprehensible. The physical, mental and emotional toll of raising children and managing a household is immense. A mother's energy is typically entirely drained by the day's end, yet each morning we emerge renewed, stronger than the day before, to shower our family with love.

Moreover, with every childbirth, a mother undergoes a metamorphosis into a more confident, potent nurturer and guardian. From a timid, insecure first-time mom resembling a doe to a stealthy tigress steadfast in her parenting

methods with the arrival of the second child and finally, a self-assured dragon, ready to breathe fire at anyone who questions her worth as 'just a mother'. The birth of each child has heralded a rebirth of my empowered self, mirroring the phoenix.

During my teenage years, my mother introduced me to my first fantasy book series, *The Wheels of Time*, sparking my captivation with the genre that has endured ever since. I matured reading fantasy and mythical works such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Neverending Story*, etc., where magic, mythical creatures and beings roam freely. I envisioned myself as an elf, vampire, dragon, fae, witch, etc. being the sole child in the family, reading and immersing myself in the realm of mythical creatures was one of the few ways to escape my solitary world."



LLEW MARSH

Entertainment professional and artistic manager of a show produced for Sun World Phu Quoc, Vietnam

"To me, dragons embody regal, wise old souls, exuding a majestic countenance. They serve as protectors and guardians for the weaker, enduring through

time yet displaying a fiery temper if pushed too far. Never underestimate a dormant dragon! Interestingly, my name 'Llewellyn' in Welsh signifies kingly and lion-hearted, and I was born in the Chinese zodiac year of the Fire Dragon. With a mixed heritage, I've always found dragons and dinosaurs fascinating!

My father, a diplomat posted to China in the 1970s, adorned our family home in Kuala Lumpur with rosewood furniture, antique Chinese vases and wall paintings featuring motifs of the Chinese dragon. Reading authors like Roald Dahl and George R.R. Martin's dragon-centric short stories, coupled with my Celtic heritage and Catholic upbringing, ingrained the Western dragon into my fantasy world.

Perhaps, as a mixed-race child,

neither white nor Asian, studying business and the arts concurrently, I've always sensed embodying both Yin and Yang. Neither fully here nor there, yet needing to be seen and blended in everywhere, this might have steered me towards developing a genuine sense of individuality. One of my life mottos is, 'Why be a second-rate version of someone else when you can be the best version of yourself?'

Growing up, I immersed myself in fantasy novels and watched dragon-themed movies, including Greek mythology, where unicorns, griffons, and minotaurs were familiar characters. I'm a devoted fan of *Jurassic Park*, *Game of Thrones* and the *House of the Dragon* series." 🐉