

*MYTHOLOGICAL ANIMALS IN
ITALIAN LITERATURE*

*ARIOSTO - ORLANDO FURIOSO
THE HIPPOGRIFF*



*APE
ITIS PININFARINA*

A hippogriff is a legendary creature, supposedly the offspring of a griffin and a mare (an adult female horse)

The griffin, or griffon, is a legendary creature with the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle. As the lion was traditionally considered the king of the beasts and the eagle was the king of the birds, the griffin was thought to be an especially powerful and majestic creature. The griffin was also thought of as king of the creatures.

Griffins are known for guarding treasure and priceless possessions.

Living far beyond the seas in the Rhiphaean Mountains, it is a large powerful creature that can move through the air more swiftly than lightning.

It figured in several of the legends of Charlemagne as a mount for some of the knights. Such unions are incredibly rare, since the relationship between the two species is usually one of predator and prey.





As a matter of fact the reason for its great rarity is that griffins regard horses as prey, so griffins and horses were supposed to be mortal enemies. This idea was strong enough in medieval times to produce an expression, "to mate griffins with horses", which meant about the same as the modern expression, "When pigs fly". The hippogriff was therefore a symbol of impossibility and love. The hippogriff, in legends is said to be far faster, stronger and more intelligent than his fathers, the griffin, apparently travelling at the "speed of lightning".

Unlike griffins, hippogriffs could be tamed and used as aerial mounts, in which role they were immortalized in the Italian Renaissance literature by the poet Ariosto.

In the few medieval legends when this fantastic creature makes an appearance, it is usually the pet of either a knight or a sorcerer. It makes an excellent steed, being able to fly as fast as lightning.

Ludovico Ariosto's poem, *Orlando furioso* (1516) contains an early description (canto IV):

XVIII

**Non è finto il destrier, ma naturale,
ch'una giumenta generò d'un Grifo:
simile al padre avea la piuma e l'ale,
li piedi anteriori, il capo e il grifo;
in tutte l'altre membra pareva quale
era la madre, e chiamasi ippogrifo;
che nei monti Rifei vengon, ma rari,
molto di là dagli aghiacciati mari.**

XX

**Quivi per forza lo tirò d'incanto;
e poi che l'ebbe, ad altro non attese,
e con studio e fatica operò tanto,
ch'a sella e briglia il cavalcò in un mese:
così ch'in terra e in aria e in ogni canto
lo facea volteggiar senza contese.
Non finzion d'incanto, come il resto,
ma vero e natural si vedea questo.**

XVIII

***No empty fiction wrought by magic lore,
But natural was the steed the wizard pressed;
For him a filly to griffin bore;
High hippogryph. In wings and beak and crest,
Formed like his sire, as in the feet before;
But like the mare, his dam, in all the rest.
Such on Rhiphaean hills, though rarely found,
Are bred, beyond the frozen ocean's bound.***

XIX

***Drawn by enchantment from his distant lair,
The wizard thought but how to tame the foal;
And, in a month, instructed him to bear
Saddle and bit, and gallop to the goal;
And execute on earth or in mid air,
All shifts of manege, course and caracole;
He with such labour wrought. This only real,
Where all the rest was hollow and ideal***

Ludovico Ariosto (8 September 1474 – 6 July 1533) was an Italian poet. He is best known as the author of the epic poem *Orlando Furioso* (1516) where he describes the adventures of Charlemagne, Orlando, and the Franks as they battle against the Saracens with diversions into many sideplots.



Orlando furioso (*The Frenzy of Orlando*, more literally *Mad Orlando*) is an epic poem which has exerted a wide influence on later culture. The earliest version appeared in 1516, although the poem was not published in its complete form until 1532. *Orlando Furioso* is a continuation of Matteo Maria Boiardo's unfinished romance *Orlando Innamorato* ("Orlando in Love", published posthumously in 1495). The action takes place against the background of the war between Charlemagne and his Christian paladins, and the Saracen army which is attempting to invade Europe. However, Ariosto has little concern for historical or geographical accuracy, and the poem wanders at will from Japan to the Hebrides, as well as including many fantastical and magical elements, such as a trip to the moon and an array of fantastical creatures including a gigantic sea monster called the orc and the hippogriff.

Many themes are interwoven in its complicated, episodic structure, but the most important plot is the paladin Orlando's love for the pagan princess Angelica, which develops into the madness of the title. After this comes the love between the female Christian warrior Bradamante and the Saracen Ruggiero. The poem is divided into forty-six cantos, each containing a variable number of eight-line stanzas in *ottava rima* (a rhyme scheme of abababcc). Ariosto's work is 38.736 lines long in total, making it one of the longest poems in European literature.



FROM PAST TO PRESENT: HARRY POTTER'S SAGA



British author J. K. Rowling introduced a hippogriff named **Buckbeak**, as a character in her *Harry Potter* book series

Buckbeak (temporarily renamed **Witherwings** during 1996 to deceive the Ministry) was a Hippogriff.

In 1993, Rubeus Hagrid brought his first Care of Magical Creatures class to see Buckbeak, as well as other Hippogriffs. Under Hagrid's direction, Harry was able to successfully approach Buckbeak, and was even allowed to ride him for a short flight around the paddock.

In The Harry Potter Saga, hippogriffs are intensely proud creatures, and an individual must show proper respect by bowing to them and waiting for them to bow in return before approaching. Eye contact should be maintained at all times without a single blink. The Hippogriff should be allowed to make the first move as it's polite. If offended, it may attack. Buckbeak is this sort of proud creature: at first he seemed to be aggressive, attacking Draco Malfoy when he insulted him. However Buckbeak was actually very affectionate and loyal to people who treated him with kindness and respect. An example of his affection was when he tried to return to Hagrid after Harry and Hermione saved him from being executed. He also protected Harry and Hermione from Remus Lupin while he was in his werewolf form. He was also shown to be very loyal to Harry, defending him from Severus Snape in 1997 when he was cornered, and joining the Battle of Hogwarts in 1998 by attacking Voldemort's giants.



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