

# Giants, Merpeople and Centaurs



a multicultural representation of myths in  
J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*

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# Introduction

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- ∞ Giants, merpeople and centaurs appear in the *Harry Potter* series. Where do these creatures come from?
- ∞ How did Rowling adapt these creatures when including them in her books?
- ∞ What role do they play in the series? Does it differ from their original function in their respective mythologies?

# Giants

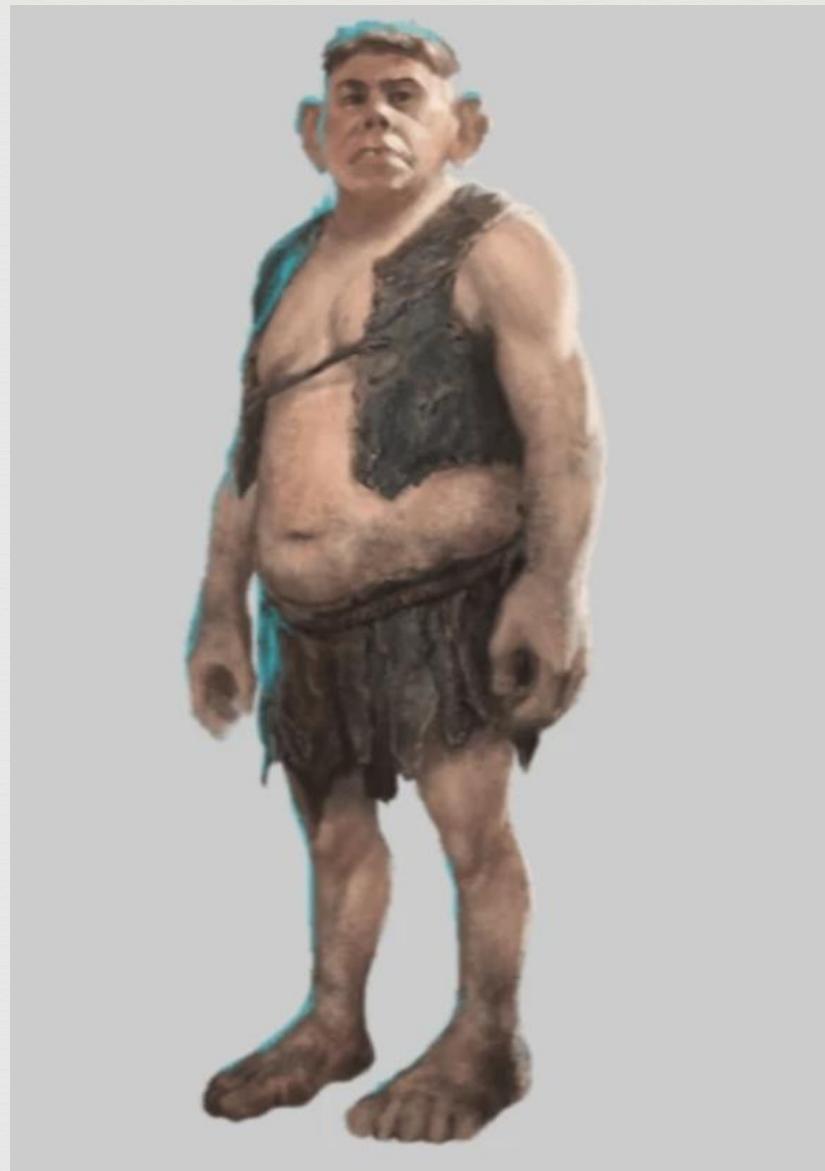


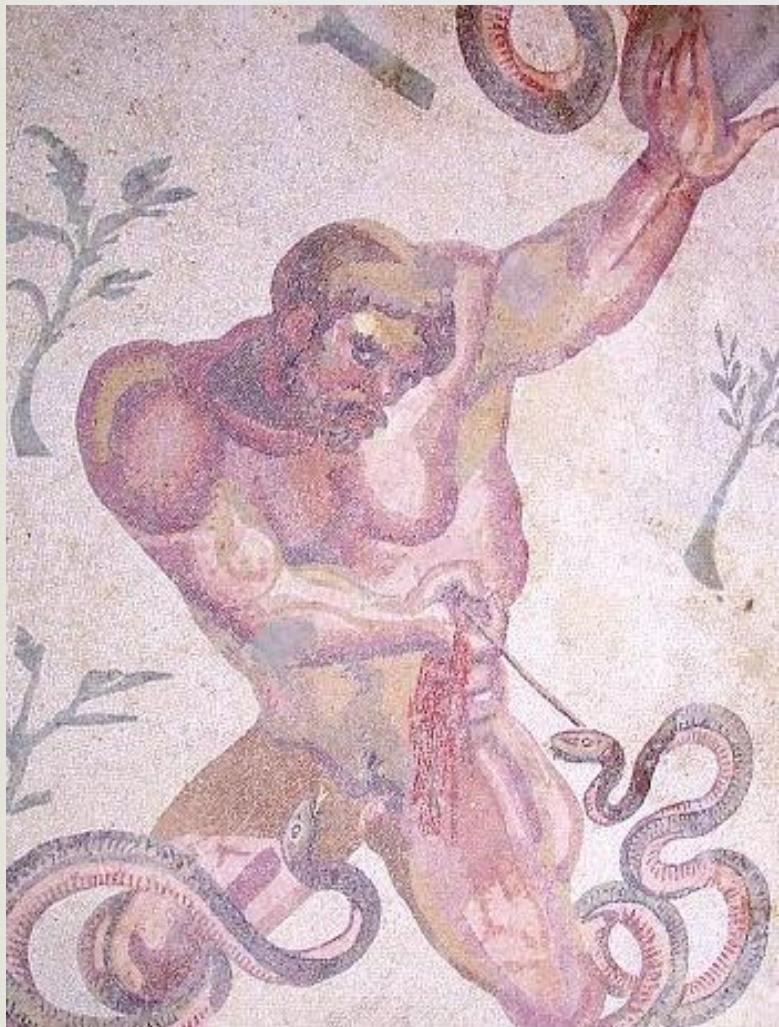
“Huge creatures of low intelligence, giants have a famously violent nature and are known to remove the heads of their enemies when angered. Growing up to twenty-five feet tall, giants live largely solitary existences” (Wizarding World website, 2023)

[https://villains.fandom.com/wiki/Giants\\_\(Harry\\_Potter\)](https://villains.fandom.com/wiki/Giants_(Harry_Potter))

"Grawp looked strangely misshapen. [...]

Grawp's head. It was much larger in proportion to the body than a human head, almost perfectly round and covered with tightly curling, close-growing hair the color of bracken. [...] The back, under what looked like a dirty brownish smock comprised of animal skins sewn roughly together, was very broad, and as Grawp slept, it seemed to strain a little at the rough seams of the skins. The legs were curled up under the body; [...] enormous, filthy, bare feet, large as sledges, resting one on top of the other on the earthy forest floor." (Rowling, 2003)





Serpent-footed Gigante, Greco-Roman mosaic  
C3rd A.D., Villa Romana del Casale

“monstrous, savage creatures often depicted with men’s bodies terminating in serpentine legs.” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023)

# Merpeople

"With grey skin, dark green hair, yellow eyes and sharp teeth, [...] Merpeople come in many different forms [...] all of whom have been responsible for the death of many mesmerised sailors." (Wizarding World website, 2023)



<https://harrypotter.fandom.com/wiki/Merpeople>

"The merpeople had grayish skin and long, wild, dark green hair. Their eyes were yellow, as were their broken teeth, and they wore thick ropes of pebbles around their necks. [...] their powerful, silver fish tails beating the water, spears clutched in their hands.." (Rowling, 2000)



<https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/313070611567921188/>

"a creature half bird and half woman who lured sailors to destruction by the sweetness of her song." (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023)



<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Siren-Greek-mythology>

"Mermaid, masculine merman, a fabled marine creature with the head and upper body of a human being and the tail of a fish [...] natural beings who, like fairies, had magical and prophetic powers. They loved music and often sang. Though very long-lived, they were mortal and had no souls." (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023)



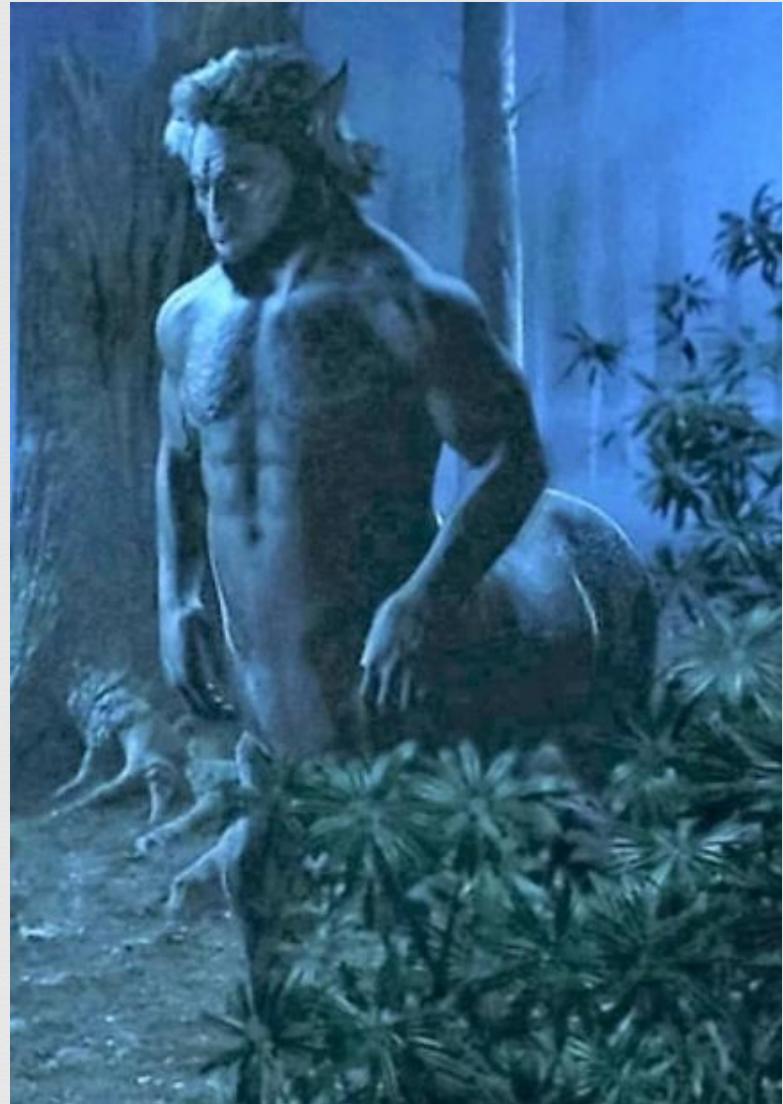
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# Centaurs



“A half-man, half-horse, Centaurs were mystical beings who were able to read the movements of the night sky in order to divine the future [...] Centaurs lived in herds and could be violent towards both outsiders and to members of their own group [...] Firenze was one such centaur who was exiled from his herd for helping humans.” (Wizarding World website, 2023)

"And into the clearing came – was it a man, or a horse? To the waist, a man, with red hair and beard, but below that was a horse's gleaming chestnut body with a long, reddish tail. [...] This one looked younger; he had white-blond hair and a palomino body [...] He had astonishingly blue eyes, like pale sapphires.." (Rowling, 1997)



<https://harrypotter.fandom.com/wiki/Firenze>



Centaur, Greco-Roman mosaic from the Palace of Hadrian C2nd A.D., Altes Museum

“a race of creatures, part horse and part man [...] Their general character was that of wild, lawless, and inhospitable beings, the slaves of their animal passions. The Centaur Chiron was not typical in this respect.” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023)

# Conclusion

	MYTHOLOGY	BOOKS
GIANTS	Aggressive, snake legs, represented the triumph of Hellenism over barbarism	Aggressive, humanoid, sided with Voldemort and lost, only Grawp was good
MERPEOPLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greek mythology: half bird, half woman.</li> <li>• Scandinavian mythology: half fish, half woman.</li> <li>• In both cases tempted sailors.</li> </ul>	Half woman, half fish. Advanced enough to wear “clothes” and use weapons. Organized in colonies.
CENTAURS	Half man, half horse. Wild, aggressive, more animal than men. One exception: Chiron.	Civilised, organized in herds. Some show antagonistic behaviours towards wizardkind. One exception: Firenze.

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Thank You