

Giants, Merpeople and Centaurs



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

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Introduction

Introduction



- ∞ 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?

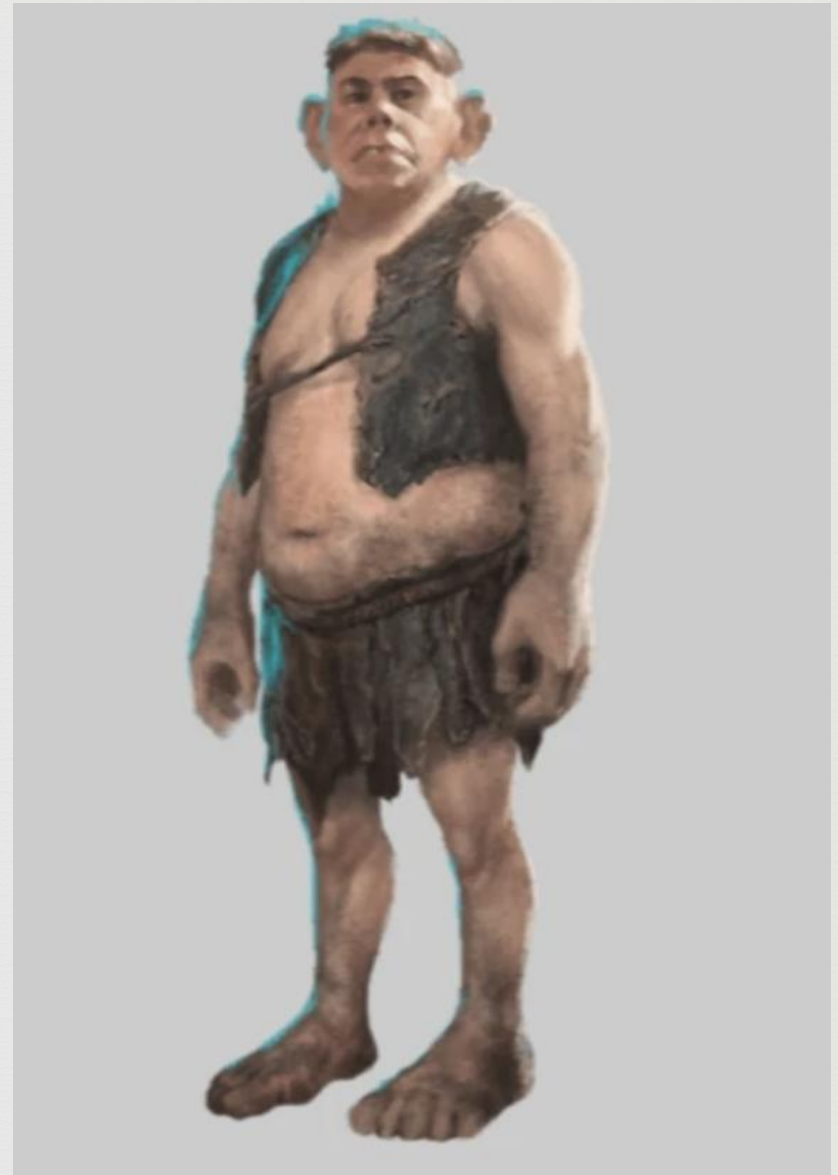
Giants



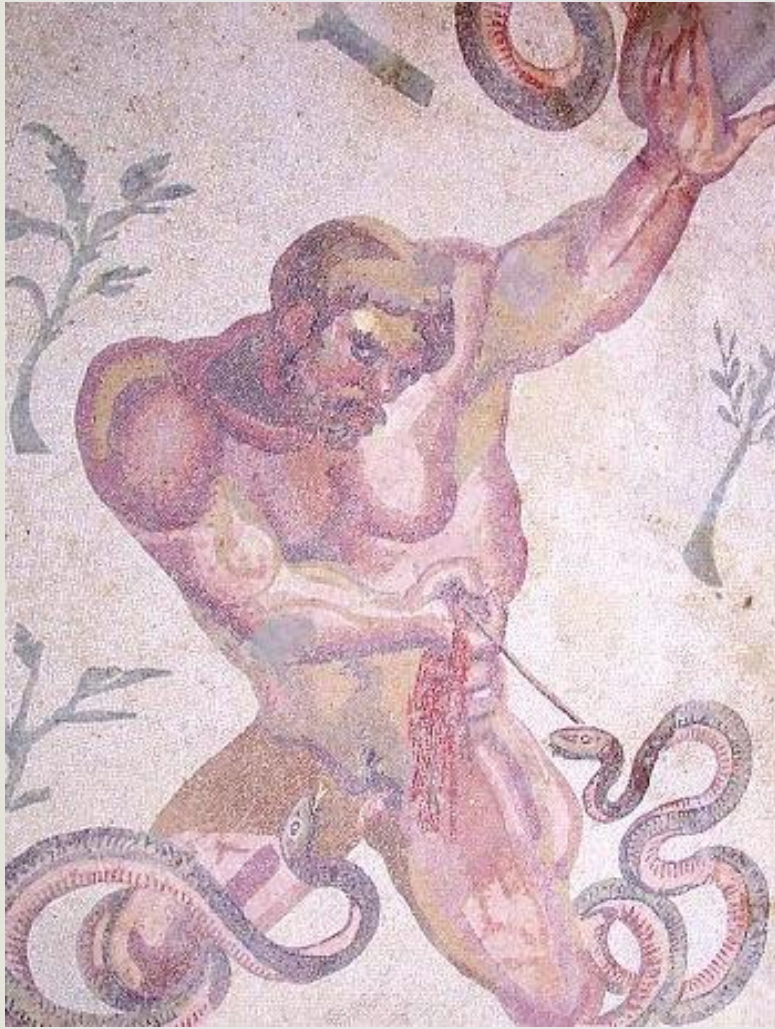
“Huge creatures of low intelligence, giants have a famously violent nature and are known to remove the heads of their enemies when angered. Growing up to twenty-five feet tall, giants live largely solitary existences” (Wizarding World website, 2023)

[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)



<https://harrypotterwizardsunite.fandom.com/wiki/Grawp>



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

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

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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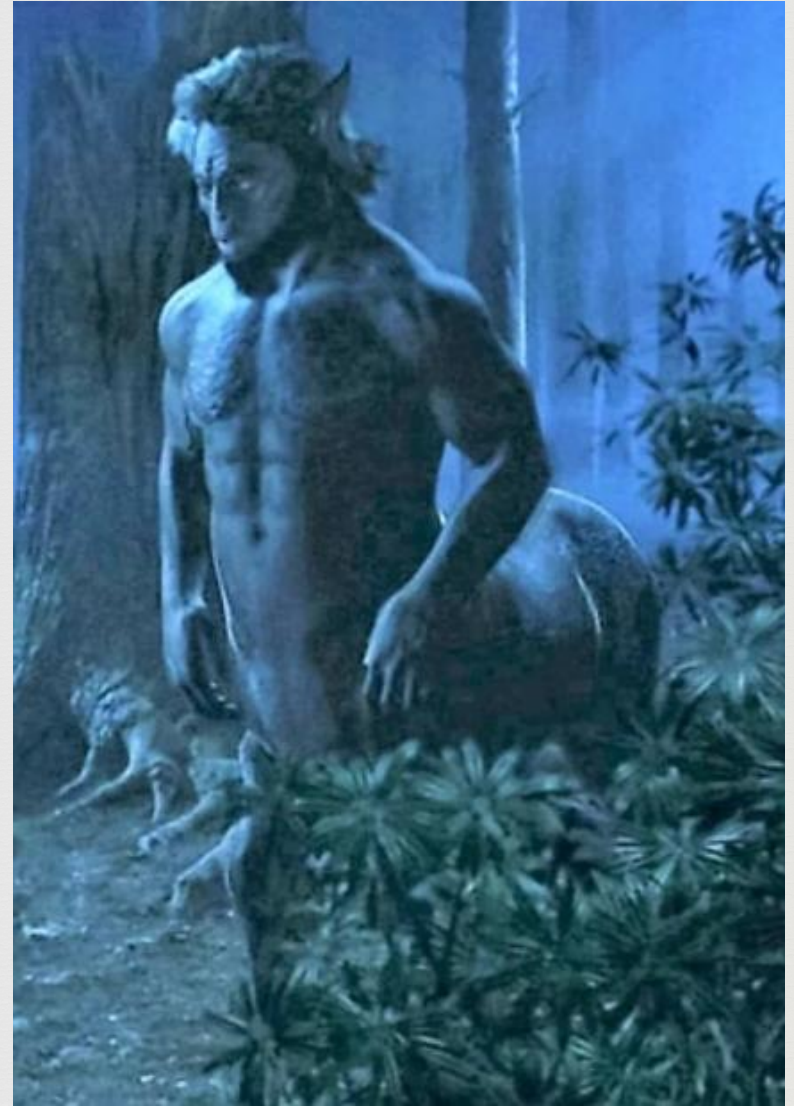
Centaur



“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)

<https://www.wizardingworld.com/features/a-closer-look-at-the-history-of-magic-audiobook>

“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>



“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)

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



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"> • Greek mythology: half bird, half woman. • Scandinavian mythology: half fish, half woman. • In both cases tempted sailors. 	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 wizarkind. One exception: Firenze.



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Thank You