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Haunting the Halls of Hogwarts: The Basilisk

Britain's most esteemed wizarding institution, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, is home to a diverse population of witches and wizards, and to many more magical creatures both friendly and hostile. On any day, you may find yourself wondering at the reclusive existence of the giant squid that occupies the lake surrounding the castle or simply paying a trip to the kitchens, where the house elves are eager to prepare you a midnight snack. Whatever your case, Hogwarts has been described by many as the "safest place on Earth", that is, until this past month.

An old myth, buried with the founder it originated with, has come back to be the focus of our attention. The Chamber of Secrets can no longer be excused as a Slytherin metaphor for exclusive pride. It has been opened, like many suspected it had been over fifty years ago, when the first signs of big trouble came to the surface.

Hogwarts has reported several cases of petrification, but in each case, targeted persons appeared to have had no physical contact with their attacker. An overwhelmingly large portion of the victims identify as muggle-born, which leads us to ask two questions. First, what monster could have the ability to turn students to stone without requiring any physical contact? Second, what motives or significance might this creature have to attack such a specific demographic?



Artist rendition of a Basilisk, the magical beast with the capacity to kill on sight

The answers revealed themselves when, just yesterday, hero of the wizarding world Harry Potter defeated the monster from the depths of the chamber: a scaly, fifty-foot-long serpent known widely as the Basilisk.

Throughout history, the Basilisk has been regarded as one of the nastiest, most venomous snakes to exist. This serpent gets its name from being considered the "King of Serpents", and is considered in this way for two prime reasons. The first, and most important, owes to the fact that this creature is far more dangerous and venomous than all other snakes. The second references the crown structure around the back of the Basilisk's head, allowing it to "look the part".

The first accounts describing an encounter with a Basilisk are actually

accounts noting an encounter with a Cobra. The venom could be shot from a distance and was particularly dangerous to the eyes. For this reason, and because the snake had no need to come into close range with the victim, the story became that the mere gaze of the snake could claim the life of its opponent.

The Basilisk is not just a snake, and specific events must occur in a particular order before the beast is born. These are those events, in that order:

1. A cock, 7 years of age, prepares to lay an egg (in agony)
2. The cock looks for somewhere to lay the egg
3. A toad watches the events anxiously
4. When the cock lays the egg, the toad comes up to sit on the egg until it hatches

The resulting animal is a cross between a cock and a reptile—the head of a rooster, with the body of a snake.



In addition to the venomous stare, the Basilisk is said to have the ability to render a tree fruitless with its touch. Only

death and destruction can come from the King of Serpent's interactions.

Many of the Basilisk's powers can be traced to similar powers of ancient Egyptian gods. The Cobra, the most similar snake to the beast in question, was valued by the Egyptians and therefore associated with many symbols and beings, such as the sun god and the Pharaoh. Protecting royal power was an important duty of both of these figures, and so is projected onto the Basilisk.

Hogwarts' Basilisk used the castle's plumbing pipes to navigate the halls of the school. This allowed young Potter to hear hissing noises coming from what appeared to be his immediate surroundings, though he could not see or identify the owner of the serpentine voice.

The Ministry of Magic has its hands in the matters of coming investigations on this incident. Ministry officials from the Department of Psychiatric Studies have set up appointments with affected students to counsel them according to their exposure to this potentially traumatizing event. One professional, Hammond Cogwell, has assessed the psychological importance of these events.

Cogwell asserts that the Basilisk's presence at Hogwarts has had a further connection to each student, beyond the physical actions that have affected them all.

"The Basilisk," he says, "has many parallels with the negative behaviors of human consciousness. The beast spends its days hidden, slithering in some form of network that can transport it easily. In this case the network of plumbing pipes provided this transport. In the same way that the pipes never hold the Basilisk back, we do not leave our consciousness behind when we change our direction of thought. We can choose not to listen to our inner thoughts, at our own risk, but they still exist with us. When Harry Potter faced this creature, he faced years of the magical world's negative and close-minded attitudes, some dating back to Salazar Slytherin's time."

"All incidents with the chamber this time were cases of petrified students and

other living or magical beings. None of the victims looked at the serpent directly. Another parallel can be drawn here. Many people refuse to look at their negative attributes and biases directly, preferring to filter the problem, or ignore it entirely. This response keeps us from growing or moving forward as individuals. The Basilisk, in a way, drills into us the idea that looking something or someone directly in the eye is potentially damaging to ourselves. Facing a societal problem can be difficult to do without taking it in full swing, as Potter showed when he finished the beast with a piercing swing through the roof of the Basilisk's mouth with none other than the legendary Sword of Gryffindor."

"The students at Hogwarts must learn to accept themselves and see themselves as a part of this larger wizarding community, and must set their beliefs against greater discrimination. Now, especially, when these students have grown up in a neglectful, abusive, or prejudiced childhood environment, or in an environment where magic was either regarded as silly notion, or was not regarded at all."

Cogwell's insights show us the inadvertent importance of the Basilisk's presence. The students and faculty at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry have learned many valuable lessons this year, especially outside of the classroom.

The public can now rest easier knowing that no such poisonous beast roams freely in Britain, but must remain aware of every possible future danger.

-- Elizabeth Perego

Author and Chief Editor for The Daily Prophet



~ Note: Pictures frozen due to close encounters with Basilisk gaze

Sacked: Lucius Malfoy

Lucius Malfoy, pureblood wizard, was dismissed from his position on the school governing board for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry this past week. Many of Malfoy's co-governors claimed to have been blackmailed by the blond-haired official, whose daytime job is with the Ministry of Magic.



~ picture courtesy of the Ministry of Magic

These accusations were related to a vote concerned with Hogwarts Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, and his ability to remain on school grounds for the duration of term. Dumbledore's presence on the grounds was in question because of recent events, detailed in the previous article.

It is believed to be the case that the head of the Malfoy household holds a nasty and personal grudge against the headmaster, for reasons not yet uncovered.

Malfoy was unavailable for comment on the claims made against him.

-- Elizabeth Perego

Author and Chief Editor for The Daily Prophet



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