

# monsters

An Investigator's Guide to Magical Beings

Revised and Expanded Third Edition



John Michael Greer

MONSTERS



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An investigator's guide  
to magical beings

*Third edition—revised and expanded*

*John Michael Greer*

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monster (mon' ster) n. [from Latin *monstrum*, that which is shown forth or revealed]



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## FOREWORD

**M**ore than two decades have now passed since I first started writing the original version of this book. It was in some ways an improbable project for me. My five previous books had explored some of the most austere and intellectual branches of the Western esoteric tradition, and had earned me the beginnings of a reputation as a serious occult author. Why the leap from ceremonial magic and occult philosophy to a subject normally associated with Halloween costumes and fantasy novels aimed at the young-adult market?

Part of the motivation for the project came from the fact that at that time I was at a crossroads in my paired careers as a writer and a student of the occult. After twenty years' work in the traditions of magic that underlay my earlier books, I was ready for new challenges. At the same time, concerns focusing on the environment were demanding more of my attention. Within a few years, an unlikely series of events would launch me into new territory as the head of a Druid order and a writer and blogger on peak oil and the future of industrial society, but I didn't know that yet; all I knew is that it was a good time to explore new options.

Another part of the motivation came from a fascination with monsters and uncanny phenomena that went back at least as far into my childhood as my interest in magic. Blame it on *Dark Shadows*, the long-defunct horror soap opera that featured vampires, werewolves, and other monstrous beings, which the elderly lady down the street who took care of my sister and me after elementary school watched religiously; blame it on Saturday afternoon TV broadcasts of low-budget creature-feature movies, each one more unintentionally funny than the last; blame it on the immeasurable tedium of an American suburban childhood in which monsters, like magic, offered one of the few reasons to hope that the world might not be as two-dimensionally tepid as my parents

and teachers all insisted it had to be—whatever the ultimate reason, monsters held my attention from earliest childhood on, and I still remembered more than enough about monsters from my youthful studies to put together a book outline in a matter of minutes.

Still, there was another factor, and all in all it was probably the most important. The magical teachings I'd spent the previous two decades studying and practicing posed sweeping questions about the nature of reality, and called into question the modern world's comfortable dismissal of entire realms of human experience most other societies take for granted. Monstrous beings define one of those realms of experience. The ways of understanding reality that are fashionable in today's industrial societies leave no room for them, and when people encounter them—as they do, fairly often—the dubious logic and dogmatic handwaving that's used to dismiss those experiences as unreal shows up blind spots in our collective consciousness that are hard to see clearly in any other way.

When I started work on the manuscript, I had no particular intention of focusing on the difference between what human beings experience and what they think they know. Still, the issues raised by that distinction could not be avoided, and so the book that finally found its way into print in 2001 was as odd a hybrid as any of the creatures it describes, a bestiary of uncanny beings crossed with a meditation on the nature of knowledge. Once it was in the hands of its original publisher, I went on to other projects.

Some hybrids, though, show unexpected vigor, and this book was one of them. Over the months and years that followed, *Monsters* became my bestselling book, a title it retains to this day. Maybe it was something in the book's blend of philosophical reflections, occult tradition, and old-fashioned monster lore that caught the fancy of the reading public—or maybe it was simply that monsters were poised to become a white-hot topic in popular culture.

Certainly, monsters dominate the collective conversation of our time to a much greater degree than they did a decade ago. Pick up a novel at random at your local supermarket these days, to name only one example, and there's a good chance that at least one of the characters is a vampire, a werewolf, or some other kind of monstrous being. Monsters of one kind or another play central roles in a fair percentage of the bestselling novels and movies of our time. I have no reason to think that the publication of *Monsters* had anything to do with all this—though it's interesting to note that my book may have had a certain influence on one of the most famous recent works of monster fiction.

Until Stephenie Meyer published the first volume of her wildly successful *Twilight* series, certainly, *Monsters* was very nearly the only place, outside of some fairly obscure academic literature on Native American anthropology, that an aspiring writer of monster fiction would have been able to read about the rich traditions of werewolf lore among the native peoples of the coastal Pacific Northwest. If that's where Meyer got that detail—and of course I have no way of knowing whether this is in fact what happened—she is certainly welcome to the idea; one of the privileges of the author

of fiction is that of gathering useful facts from nonfiction, just as one of the privileges of the writer of popular nonfiction is that of gathering raw material from the sort of dense specialist literature where I found discussions of Native American shapeshifters and wolf magic.

Whether or not some future bestseller draws a detail or two from between these covers is up to those imponderable forces that delight in weaving irony into the substance of our daily lives. It has now been twenty years since the first edition saw print and ten since a revised and expanded second edition appeared, and it seemed appropriate to bring out a third edition to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of *Monsters*.

I owe thanks to a great many people for their help at the various stages of this project. For the first edition, I received a great deal of help from the staff of Suzzallo Library at the University of Washington, Seattle, WA, and the downtown branch of the Seattle Public Library; the interlibrary loan staff at the latter were especially helpful. My friends Richard Brzustowicz, Corby Ingold, and Gordon Cooper pointed me toward various bits of monstrous lore, and Gordon also accompanied me on several monster hunts, one of which provided evidence for the old claim that paranormal entities don't always like to have their pictures taken!

For the second edition, the staff of the South Cumberland branch of the Allegany County Library System and of Ort Library at Frostburg State University, Frostburg, MD, were reliably helpful, and found me crucial resources for the new chapters on zombies and chimeras.

When I went to work on this new edition, the staff of the Walker branch of the East Providence Library System, East Providence, RI, were their usual cheerful and helpful selves, and provided a good supply of recent books on monsters to fill in the gaps another decade has left in the subject. Robert Mathiesen helped me find data on New England vampire lore, and Oliver Rathbone of Aeon Books eagerly welcomed the chance to bring out a third edition. My thanks go with all.



## INTRODUCTION

Every year on October 31, in those increasingly rare communities where it's safe to do so, American children don costumes and go from door to door for Halloween treats, enacting the last shreds of an ancient tradition. Even in an age of video-game heroes and trading-card characters, many of these children dress up as figures out of nearly forgotten legends: vampires, werewolves, ghosts, goblins, angels, demons, and other uncanny beings. The same entities make a yearly appearance in party decorations, store windows, greeting cards, and a hundred other products of our consumer society. It's an odd sort of tribute to the primal terrors of another age.

A thousand years ago, when people across the world believed in the stark reality of these same beings, the night of October 31 was commemorated in deadly earnest. It had other names then—Samhain (pronounced "sah-ween"), the Old Irish term for it, is one still remembered—and a very different character. In those days, instead of candy for children, offerings of food and drink were left out for shadowy entities that came by night—entities that might leave behind considerably worse than an uprooted picket fence if they did not find their accustomed fare. Vampires and shapeshifters, spirits of the ancestors and spirits that were never human at all, intelligent beings with subtle bodies or none, were as much a matter of everyday life then as electricity is now.

But we know better nowadays, of course.

Don't we?

This book is based on the uncomfortable knowledge that we don't know better—that at least some of these entities had, and still have, a reality that goes beyond the limits of human imagination and human psychology. For most people nowadays, such ideas would be terrifying if they weren't so preposterous. Plenty of modern

Americans believe that UFOs are spacecraft from other worlds and psychics can bend silverware with their minds—but the existence of vampires and werewolves? To make things worse, this book explores such beings from the standpoint of an equally discredited system of thought: the traditional lore of Western occultism, which has been denounced and derided by right-thinking folk since the end of the Renaissance.

It's easy and comforting to write off monsters and magic alike as the exploded superstitions of a more ignorant time. The problem is, as the introductory essay to this book will show, that this explanation simply won't wash. People still encounter many of the monstrous beings of ancient and medieval folklore, even in modern American suburbs. Equally, people in America and elsewhere still practice magic—more so with each passing year, in fact, as the occult renaissance of the last few decades continues to broaden its popularity and deepen its understanding of the traditions it follows.

Tens of thousands of people in America today have personal experience with the fact that magic works, and hundreds of thousands of Americans have encountered one or more monstrous beings over the course of their lives. Despite centuries of dismissal and condemnation, both magic and monsters are thus living realities in the modern world. Even if this were the only evidence involved, it would suggest that we're dealing with something considerably deeper than mere superstition. Nor, as we'll see, is it the only evidence.

Ideas of this sort, which challenge the foundations of our culture's map of reality, call up strange reactions in many people. One person who reviewed the original draft of this book took issue with a passage in the introductory essay where I pointed out that the Scientific Revolution's rejection of the magical side of reality was based on theoretical assumptions, not experimental evidence. Not true, the reviewer claimed; experiments had been done proving that magic didn't work. The review was anonymous, and so I didn't have the chance to ask the reviewer to back up this claim with some sort of proof from actual historical sources. It might have made for an interesting conversation, for the history of the Scientific Revolution is very well documented, and the evidence for such experiments simply doesn't exist.

This sort of mythmaking about the past is far from rare. Millions of American schoolchildren, for instance, have been taught that in 1492, when Columbus set sail, nearly everyone in Europe believed that the world was flat. Everybody knows that this is true ... except that it isn't. It takes about fifteen minutes of research in a decently stocked library to find out that the ancient Greeks knew the actual shape of the Earth by the fourth century BC, that this information was preserved in Europe through the Dark Ages in the writings of late classical encyclopedists such as Martianus Capella, and that all through the Middle Ages the spherical nature of the Earth was a basic axiom of cosmology known to everyone with a basic education.

As for 1492, the standard textbook of astronomy studied throughout Western Europe by Columbus' contemporaries—John of Sacrobosco's *On the Sphere*—starts out with a set of sound, logical proofs showing that the Earth is a sphere, that it is infinitesimally small compared to the universe as a whole, and that the sun, moon, and planets are almost unimaginably far away in terms of earthly distances. People

laughed at Columbus, not because they thought the world was flat, but because they thought the distance from Western Europe due west to the coasts of Asia was too far away to reach in a fifteenth-century sailing ship ... *and they were right*. It's just that neither they nor Columbus nor anyone else knew that there were two undiscovered continents in the way.

"History," Henry Ford said, "is the bunk commonly believed." Every culture reinvents its own past in the image of its dreams, its fears, its fantasies, and its myths. Nowadays, especially, we force history through the filter of our belief in progress, the ruling mythology of the modern age. We convince ourselves that we are smarter and better informed than our ancestors for no other reason than the fact that we live after them. It's a very comfortable sort of logic, and never more so than when we look at the ancient and often terrifying lore of monsters.

Be this as it may, this book explores the realm of monstrous beings, without apology, from the perspective of traditional magical lore. As I am a practicing ceremonial magician and an initiate of several magical orders, it would be difficult for me to approach the subject in any other way. Still, there's a point to the connection, for the teachings of Western magical tradition include a good deal of little-known information about monsters of one sort or another, and offer ways of looking at the evidence that help make sense of some of the most puzzling features of monster fact and folklore. Furthermore, since magic has its practical side as well, magical perspectives on monstrous beings also provide ways of dealing with these puzzling and potentially dangerous entities when they stray into the human world.

Those who venture into this book expecting something more in tune with the wider literature on paranormal beings and phenomena may be in for a few surprises. Some of the entities that appear in these other sources take on very different shapes when viewed through the lens of magical tradition. Still, my hope is that readers who already have a background in the literature of the unexplained will find this book useful as well.





## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

**M***onsters: An Investigator's Guide to Magical Beings* is divided into four parts. Part I, "The nature of monsters," is an introductory essay about monsters and monster lore, exploring what monsters are, how they affect the human world, and why it is that people in modern Western cultures are convinced they don't exist. It covers the basic theoretical framework we'll be using to study the realm of monstrous beings, and presents a set of questions and basic approaches that will be central throughout the rest of the book.

Part II, "A field guide to monsters," surveys twelve basic classes of monstrous beings—vampires, zombies, ghosts, werewolves and other shapeshifters, creatures of faery, chimeras, mermaids, dragons, spirits, angels, demons, and tulpas—discussing their history, their traditional lore, their modern (and usually wildly inaccurate) images, and the uncomfortable realities that lie behind the latter. Methods for identifying each of the monsters in question, and dealing with them when they come into contact with the human world, are also given here.

Part III, "A guide to monster investigation," presents detailed methods for the fine art of investigating a reported monster sighting. Basic skills, equipment, interviewing techniques, research methods, dealing with (or avoiding) publicity, search and surveillance procedures, and actually confronting monstrous beings face to face, are all covered here. A major focus of this section is on methods of telling the difference between authentic monster sightings, on the one hand, and hoaxes, delusions, and cases of mistaken identity on the other.

Part IV, "Magical self-defense," covers some basic techniques of magic that can be of use when dealing with monsters directly. The methods of natural magic—that branch of magic using the subtle effects of herbs, stones, and other substances—can

be put to use by anyone at any time, and provide a first line of protection when monstrous activities pose a threat to human health, safety, or sanity. The methods of ritual magic require systematic study practice before they can be used effectively; since I have written extensively about ritual magic in other books, I include some suggestions for further reading for the would-be monster hunter and leave it at that.

All through these sections, I have had several different audiences in mind—magical practitioners who seek to study the traditional lore concerning monstrous beings; people outside the magical community who are interested in unexplained phenomena, and who may also be interested in finding out what magical tradition has to say on the subject; and those who are dealing directly with monstrous beings of one sort or another, and need practical information and guidance. Each of these audiences will find it most useful to approach this book in a somewhat different way.

### *Magical practitioners*

Magical practitioners will not need convincing that supernatural forces and entities exist—anyone who has done six months or more of systematic training with traditional magical disciplines knows that already, from direct personal experience—and will also be familiar with the elementary material on magical practice in Part IV of this book. The introductory essay that makes up Part I will be useful purely to give the magically literate reader some idea of this book’s approach to the subject. Part II, the “field guide” itself, will be the most useful section for magicians, although those who intend to take their study of monster lore onto a more practical level will want to review the material in Part III as well.

### *Researchers of the unexplained*

Those interested in unexplained phenomena will find Part I a necessary introduction to this book, since the approach I have taken differs sharply from that of most modern books on the unexplained. The field guides to individual monsters in Part II may be the most entertaining part of the book, but nearly everything that’s said there rests on Part I’s foundations. Parts III and IV will be of interest only to those who expect or hope to deal with monstrous beings in something other than an armchair fashion, or are at least curious about how it’s done.

### *People encountering monstrous beings*

Those dealing with monstrous beings themselves will find Parts III and IV, the investigator’s guide and the handbook of basic magical approaches, the most practically useful, although the profiles of individual monster types in Part II will be useful for figuring out what exactly is going on and what might best be done about it. People living in the midst of monster activity rarely need to be convinced that something uncanny is going on, and the theoretical perspectives in Part I can be left for a quiet afternoon when the poltergeist isn’t acting up or the creature in the nearby lake hasn’t been seen for several weeks.

## A CAUTIONARY NOTE

A little knowledge, as the proverb has it, is a dangerous thing. This is especially true when dealing with monsters and monster lore. While there's good reason to think that monstrous beings exist and interact with the human world on occasion, none of them are common, and many of the classic types are extremely rare in the present age. It's sometimes easy to forget this and imitate the character in Jerome K. Jerome's novel *Three Men in a Boat*, who spends a rainy afternoon reading a medical textbook and ends up convinced he has every disease in it except for housemaid's knee.

If you start seeing monsters under every shrub you pass, then, it's time to take a long break from monster-related studies. If matters go further than this—if thoughts and fears related to monstrous beings become obsessive, if monster research begins to take up an unhealthy share of your time and attention, or if anything connected to monsters ever leads you to consider violence against yourself or another person—you need to seek professional psychological help at once. Partly because it involves intense challenges to the accepted version of what's real, partly because it touches on archaic terrors that reach down into the most ancient levels of human consciousness, the pursuit of monsters can put a good deal of strain on one's mental health, and the student of monster lore needs to keep out a wary eye for the signs of imbalance. He or she also needs to listen when someone else says that matters are getting out of control.

It would also be best to note here that my own interest in monsters is one part, and a relatively small one, of a broader commitment to studying, practicing, and

teaching the traditional magical lore of the Western world. I am not primarily a monster researcher, and my own work in the field relates to certain very specific (and very local) branches of monster lore; if you're looking for someone to investigate a monster sighting, you'll need to look somewhere else. You can also simply read Part III of this book carefully, and do the investigating yourself—that is, after all, why it was written.

# An Investigator's Guide to Monsters

*Monsters: An Investigator's Guide to Magical Beings* takes you on a harrowing journey into the realm of monsters and the reality of the impossible. Bringing together folklore, Western magical philosophy and field experience, this book is required reading for both active and armchair monster hunters.

Between these covers you will find a chilling collection of fiendish facts and folklore such as why true vampires are the least attractive, five different kinds of ghosts, the magical origins of the werewolf legends, hidden connections between faery lore and UFOs, and where dragons are found today. This is an essential field guide to monsters from angels to zombies with advice on monster investigation and magical self-defence.

This latest edition not only has a new chapter on tulpas, but the chapters on vampires and chimeras are significantly expanded with new material. Plus, the section on monster investigation has been thoroughly updated with details on new technology and the approach of the media to monster hunting.

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