

MONSTERS

by Tricia Glensor



Before you go to sleep at night, do you check under the bed for monsters? If you do, don't worry – you're not the only one!

People everywhere tell stories about monsters. Some monsters are huge, scary creatures that roam the countryside. Others lie in wait in caves or rivers, ready to grab anyone who comes too close. And some monsters look frightening but can be caring and friendly. Here are some examples.

Kāhui Tipua

In Aotearoa, there are stories about the Kāhui Tipua – a tribe of fierce giants. According to these stories, the Kāhui Tipua lived long ago in the South Island. Some of them were so big they could stride from one mountaintop to another and swallow whole streams. They hid in caves and attacked anyone who walked past.



Afinemata/Gāhehelevao

Tokelau has stories about a monster called Afinemata or Gāhehelevao. This monster prowls round the island at night, dragging a long fishing line behind her or carrying a sack. She uses these to catch children who misbehave, then carries them off. Sometimes, if it's getting late and their children don't want to go to bed, parents might tell a story about her. "Afinemata will be coming around soon. You'd better be tucked up in bed and fast asleep."

Kraken

In Norway and other Scandinavian countries, there are tales about huge sea creatures called kraken. These monsters are described as being like giant octopuses. Sailors feared kraken because, in the tales, they sometimes attacked and sank passing ships.



Oni

Japan has stories about giants called oni. These monsters have horns on their heads and very sharp claws, and they carry heavy clubs called kanabō. To make sure these monsters stay away, people throw roasted soybeans out of their houses and shout “Oni wa soto!” (“Oni, go out!”). They do this during the Spring Festival to bring good luck for the following year.

Sometimes Japanese children play a game where one person pretends to be an oni and chases the others.



Dragon

Some dragons breathe fire and have powerful wings. Others have scales and sharp claws and slither along the ground like snakes. Some live underground, guarding piles of treasure.



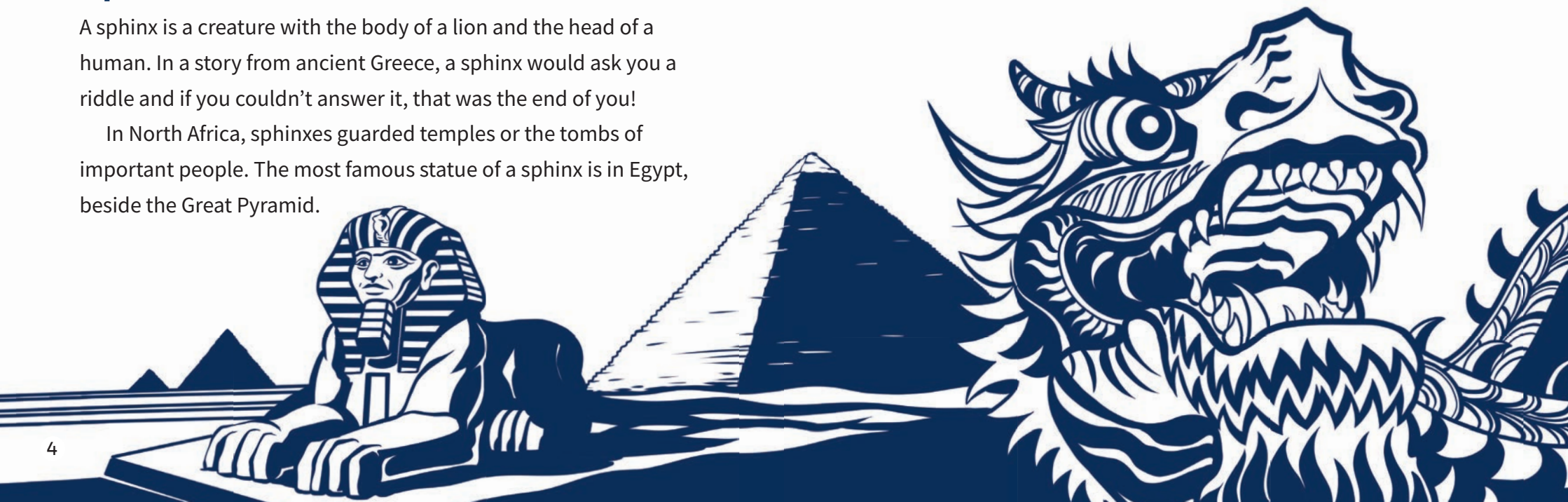
In England, there are stories about Saint George, a brave knight who rode out to fight a dragon that was terrifying people all over the countryside.

However, not all dragons are bad. Chinese dragons look fierce, but many people say they bring good luck. On special occasions, such as Chinese New Year, you might see a colourful dragon being carried through the streets by a group of dancers.

Sphinx

A sphinx is a creature with the body of a lion and the head of a human. In a story from ancient Greece, a sphinx would ask you a riddle and if you couldn't answer it, that was the end of you!

In North Africa, sphinxes guarded temples or the tombs of important people. The most famous statue of a sphinx is in Egypt, beside the Great Pyramid.



Bunyip

The Aboriginal people of Australia tell stories of a creature called a bunyip. There are many different descriptions of this creature, so nobody is really sure what it looks like. The bunyip lives in swamps and billabongs (pools of water), and it's big enough to kill and eat a person. But in some of these stories, bunyips are gentle creatures that only eat grass and plants.



Chinthe

The chinthe is another monster that's not as scary as it looks. Temples in Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos often have two huge statues of chinthes at their door. They look like enormous lions, but chinthes are helpful monsters. Their main task is to protect the building and the people inside it.



Why are there so many stories about monsters?

These are just some of the monsters that you will find in stories around the world.

Many people think that stories about scary monsters were told to children to stop them from misbehaving. Other stories might have been made up to explain frightening things like volcanic eruptions or earthquakes. Or they could have been told to stop children from going to dangerous places, such as deep rivers or caves.

Stories about good monsters might help people to feel safer. These stories reassure us that there are powerful creatures to guard our homes and protect us from danger.

But many people believe that monsters only really exist in our heads – they are the fears and worries that we all have from time to time. The best way to get rid of *those* monsters is to face up to them and look them straight in the eye.

illustrations by Scott Pearson



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