

# Misadventures with elves

**FOR reasons that remained hidden to me – and which, I felt, were most unjust – I still had not located sufficient (or even, if I was brutally honest with myself, possibly any) of the supposedly mythical creatures necessary for my DipCrypt case log.**

I take my continuing education obligations most seriously, and this had not been for lack of strenuous effort, with considerable international travel. At least, however, I was accumulating a growing body of knowledge about the environments in which such creatures were reputed to live, which I was sure had to count for something. At least it would help me pass the theory exam.

Nevertheless, I continued to hold hopes of one day actually encountering some of the creatures I was attempting to study, and treat. Accordingly, when recently invited to speak at a scientific seminar in Denmark, I jumped at the chance to visit a land well known in cryptozoological circles for its rich mythological heritage.

Denmark is replete with legends and sagas about ancient heroes, gods, and the creation of the universe. According to ancient lore, Denmark is populated by dwarves, jötnar (giants), trolls, the feared Fenris (a giant wolf), sea serpents and elves. It was time to see whether any grains of truth might still underlie the old stories.

## Hazards of cryptozoology

And so it was that one dark, stormy night in late November, I stepped from the warm interior of a taxi onto the chilly cobblestoned streets of one of Europe's best-preserved mediaeval cities.

The taxi-driver had not spoken false: the cutting wind did indeed appear to have come directly from the North Pole. Its icy breath seemed to have lowered the temperature well below freezing, but cryptozoologists must be able to master the most demanding of environments, and so I clamped my chattering teeth and set forth into the wind.

My first challenge was to locate the accommodation kindly provided by my hosts. The Hotel Bethel was located at

Nyhavn, a side pocket off the storm-tossed harbour of this water-based city. My bracing walk along the harbour wall would provide my first opportunity to search for signs of cryptozoological life.

I was particularly interested in the Jörmungandr, or Midgårdsormen, of Norse mythology. This massive serpent was infamous for terrorising fishermen, rising like a column from the water to attack and swallow small vessels and their hapless crew.

Cautiously, I scanned the slick oily water for any glint of the sharp black scales and

famously placed a binocular to his blind eye, stating "I see no white flag!" Not known for his restraint in the face of perceived threat, he then proceeded to destroy most of the Danish fleet, after Denmark unwisely sided with Napoleon. The British also occupied the Kastellet for six weeks, in 1807.

And so it was with a sense of history guiding me that I stole away from my conference at lunch, to cross the bridges over the double-moat, thereby entering within the inner gates. In seconds I gained territory that had costs the lives of many other British visitors, long ago.

## The perils of fraternisation

My explorations continued later that evening, when the charming hotel receptionist directed me across the old city to a restaurant said to offer an excellent vegetarian buffet. And so, wrapped against the cold, I ventured once more into the cobblestoned streets.

Beautiful olde European architecture greeted me at every turn, with every second building apparently an art gallery! This was a city clearly rich in both ancient and modern culture. As I lingered by the jewellery and art stores, peals of laughter caught my attention. Turning, I beheld a group of singing teenage girls heading my way. Snatches of English indicated that one of them was turning 17 that night.

As they drew closer, however, my cryptozoological instincts were awakened. The fine features and long blonde hair of the Scandinavian people are believed by many to reveal their Elven (or álfar) heritage. Some interbreeding with humans apparently occurred, which could on occasion be useful, as the ælfen were possessed of magical powers. They could, for

flaming red eyes for which this beast is known, but was rewarded with only salty spray and a rising wind. With mixed feelings, I retreated once more to the safety of the alleyways.

Exactly how one would conduct a clinical examination or treatment of such a monster was a question that would for now remain a mystery. Perhaps it was for the best.

## Danish-style venues

My spirits soon rose, however, on catching sight of the noble spires and battlements of the "hotel" in which I was to stay. Clearly, my hosts had both a fine taste in architecture and a deep understanding of the environments necessary for optimal preparation of conference presentations by their overworked lecturers.

It also offered a fine view of the harbour, complete with houseboats and promenade cafés, bedecked with bulbs and glowing lanterns.

My delight continued the next morning as my colleagues and I walked to the conference venue along the harbour wall. We passed the outer edge of the Amalienborg Palace, apparently still inhabited by the Danish royal family.

The conference centre itself was located on a small strip of land between the water and the Kastellet, a massive mediaeval fort, complete with moats and high pentagonal walls, that has formed part of the northern fortifications of this oft-invaded city since the 17th century.

Other British visitors have also been drawn to the Kastellet, since 1801, when Lord Nelson



*The location of my hotel at Nyhavn allowed me to scan the harbour for Jörmungandr sightings. Below: the nearby Christianshavns Canal.*



example, pass through walls and doors in the manner of ghosts.

Elf-fraternisation, however, is notoriously dangerous, for not all elves are benign. The infamous elf-bolt was apparently used to injure both cattle and people, and Scandinavians accordingly placed elf-crosses (Alfkors, Älvkors or Ellakors) on their walls to protect themselves against malevolent elves. The prominent cross in my hotel dining room suggested both the existence of an elf problem – and that the old ways were not entirely dead.

Hence, it was with wary eyes that I observed the approaching girls. No elf bows were on obvious display, but my previous failures of female judgement have occasionally proven spectacular. Furthermore, they appeared on the verge of dancing, and men lured into elvish dances are known to be at grave risk of enchantment. Several have reappeared only after many years have passed in the outside world.

Whatever their precise genotype, these women were indeed enchanting – and I was due at work in London the next afternoon. Unfortunately, I was fairly sure my employers would not accept my "elvish entrapment" excuse, should I arrive several years too late. Regrettably, understanding of the occupational hazards facing veterinary cryptozoologists remains as underdeveloped as our financial recompense.

And so I regretfully turned and faced into the icy wind once more, to continue my lonely quest to study, and hopefully one day bring the benefits of modern medicine, to those amazing but woefully neglected creatures, who are considered by mainstream clinicians to be mythical or extinct.

**ANDREW KNIGHT** continues the series on his quest for 'CPD with a difference...'



Andrew Knight, BVMS, CertAW, PhD, MRCVS, a London-based veterinary cryptozoologist, hopes to become the first RCVS-registered specialist in the medicine and surgery of supposedly mythical animals (DipCrypt).



*Amalienborg Palace, seen from Copenhagen's Opera House.*