

BELLEROPHON AND PEGASUS



By LESLIE PHELPS



THE story of the winged horse, Pegasus, and his master Bellerophon, has furnished the basic theme for a number of interesting stories of fantasy. Not long ago, in this magazine, the novelette "Mr. Beller and the Winged Horse" appeared—an excellent take-off on the story of the mythical horse. But there was little connection between Mr. Beller and his early Greek counterpart, Bellerophon. The original story from Greek mythology is a fascinating tale in itself—and remember—the Greeks were no slouches at contriving fantasies of the first order. Even today our speech is punctuated with allusions to that mythology.

Bellerophon was supposedly the son of a Corinthian king who for undescribed reasons, committed an impulsive, unpremeditated murder. In order to avoid punishment he fled his father's court to the court of King Proteus, who purified him of his crime. But Proteus' wife Antea, a lovely young thing, fell in love with Bellerophon, a love which he did not return. Naturally she slandered him to Proteus.

Proteus liked him so well, however, that he could not bring himself to kill Bellerophon personally, so he sent him to a friend's court, the court of Iobates, with a sealed, cryptic letter telling that the bearer should be killed. But Bellerophon was favored of the gods. Iobates got to like him also.

After a while, Iobates read the tablet, but having come to like and know Bellerophon, decided that he couldn't do the job himself either. He sought for a way out. He sent him to perform tasks which would undoubtedly result in his death.

Bellerophon prayed to the gods though, invoking their protection, and before setting out to kill the Chimaera, a monster of three parts—lion, goat and dragon—received a magic bridle which was to enable him to capture Pegasus, the immortal winged horse. Quickly Bellerophon caught his flying steed and without difficulty rose into the air and slew the Chimaera. The battle was a furious affair because the lion-section of the monster breathed fire. Yet such was the speed of Pegasus that Bellerophon was enabled to avoid the flames.

When he returned to Iobates' court, Bellerophon was sent on another mission, the defeat of a fierce tribe of warriors. With Pegasus, he vanquished them. Next on his list of tasks came the battle with the Amazons, whom Bellerophon also beat thoroughly.

Finally Iobates realized that Bellerophon was

protected by the gods, and that it was useless to try to kill him. Bellerophon married Iobates' daughter and shared in the rule of the land.

But owning Pegasus was too much for Bellerophon. It was something like owning a supercharged, high-speed racing car. Bellerophon became swollen with pride and vanity. All this time he had led a more than charmed life and had escaped the dangers of a thousand lifetimes. His head got considerably bigger and he thought he could do no wrong. He decided to try to ride to heaven on Pegasus to see, out of idle curiosity, just what the gods were like. Zeus observed all this, and in spite of his liking for the now rather obnoxious youth, became offended at his audacity and decided to do something about it. Bellerophon was riding high on Pegasus, when a gadfly sent by Zeus stung the winged horse, who bucked and threw his rider. Bellerophon plummeted to Earth. Still his life was charmed and he landed unhurt, though Pegasus was gone forever.

In their anger with him, the gods decided that Bellerophon, who till now had been their favorite, should be suitably punished. What better way to make the youth's life miserable than sending him to the loneliest places on Earth. But even this wasn't necessary. Bellerophon was evidently a good "guy" at heart, for he became seized with remorse and regret at the way he had lived. He was so moved by the thoughts of how blessed his life had been and how foolishly he had thrown away his gifts, that he was seized with a terrible melancholy—probably mythology's first first-class manic-depressive. The upshot of it all was that he followed, of his own accord, the intention of the punitive gods for he wandered the rest of his life in the most desolate and barren spots of the world.

So goes the original Greek legend of Bellerophon and Pegasus. But on a number of occasions this has been changed and expanded. Among the innumerable legends that are associated with Alexander the Great is the one that he was Bellerophon in disguise. In fact, it is said that he believed himself to be the Greek hero in his less rational moments, of which he is reputed to have had many.

The city of Corinth erected an altar to Bellerophon, over the grave of Poseidon, god of the sea, and the crumbled remains are to be seen today. Pegasus is recalled a thousand times today and in a thousand ways—from the names of aircraft to the bric-a-brac statuary that dominates some cheap stores.



ORDERS FOR WILLIE WESTON

by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

WHEN Private First class Willie Weston realized that the grenade was going off in a matter of seconds he thought with classic detachment that it had been a most peculiar sort of day.

First there had been that business of the orders. . . .

He had been told that morning he was being transferred to another outfit. The first sergeant instructed him to report to the orderly room for his orders.

Willie had gone to the orderly room as instructed and told the Charge of Quarters what he wanted. The CQ was a corporal with nine months of service which made him quite an old campaigner in this new army. He picked a copy of Willie's orders from a basket

**Old soldiers never die—their
reward comes on the parade ground—
but Willie Weston wasn't quite sure**