

Interview with a Basilisk

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I am a plumed basilisk, memory, noemata, and current systemmates inform me.

Basilisks, where I hail from, are created—not born. Through the use of intense, powerful ritual magic, a basilisk egg can be created and subsequently hatched. Basilisk eggs are comparable to the size of an ostrich egg, with newly hatched basilisks roughly around five feet in length. The young basilisk will grow rapidly at first, shedding once a week for the first couple months of its life. This growth spurt will not last and it will shed less and less as time goes on: once a month, once ever three months, once every six months, once a year, and so forth. A young adult basilisk will be anywhere from 25 to 35 feet in length, depending. Basilisks never stop growing and it is unknown how large a basilisk could theoretically get if given enough time and the needed food source. I am not sure if there are sub-species of basilisks, though I do know we are considered taxonomical relatives to other, naturally-occurring, species of magical serpents.

Basilisks are duty-bound to a singular individual upon hatching, through methods that I theorize involve both the performance of the ritual and being with the egg when it begins to crack open, so as to allow some form of magical imprinting to occur. The basilisk will not be able to intentionally turn its gaze nor fangs upon an individual it is bound to, outside of the most extenuating life-or-death circumstances—and even then, perhaps not. It will be inclined towards following the instructions and desires of its creator throughout its creator's lifetime (and beyond, situation depending). The basilisk will not suffer physically or mentally if the individual it is bound to dies, however.

Basilisks are not capable of hatred, nor are they are not capable of love. Disdain and fondness are perhaps the strongest emotions you could ascribe to a basilisk, but even that would be somewhat anthropomorphic in its assignment. My species is that of a magical animal, capable of reasoning and sapience, but in a much different way than that of the *logos*-oriented understandings humans have of those concepts. Basilisks do not have spoken language or written word. We have our instinctual understandings of the world, the duties assigned to us by our creators, and the knowledge to build from there in certain ways relevant to our continued survival. While basilisks can form relationships with humans, if you were to put a basilisk in a position where it must pick its duty or those it knows, it would likely pick its duty. Moral dilemmas are not something basilisks are known for wrestling with, as we typically act with single-minded decidedness. Free will is a concept that does not fit into the framework of how this species functions most typically, as we do not have the same bonds, responsibilities, morals,

and ideas that humans do around such. A basilisk does not like or dislike being a deadly weapon: a basilisk simply is.

Like all others of my species, I have unique traits that make me both markedly dangerous and remarkably resilient. Basilisks are termed the “King of Serpents” due to both their looks as gargantuan, thick snakes with dragon-like heads, their ability to maintain an upright posture similar to that of a cobra, and because of their magical capabilities:

Venom. A basilisk’s mouth is a maw filled with two particularly large fangs on its top row of teeth. These fangs are connected to a venom gland which pumps venom directly into a bite, but it is interesting to note that all basilisk teeth are coated with its venom. I am led to believe that this is because the venom is also within the basilisk’s saliva to some degree as well, though I don’t have confirmation on this. Basilisk venom is fast-acting and always lethal. It immobilizes its victims with spasms of pain, and memory serves to inform me that the bite mark quickly becomes a deep purple-grey pit that collapses in on itself, with stark veins popping upwards from the skin leading from the original bite deeper into the body. Where I am from, there is no known antidote to this venom. I do not know if basilisks are immune to their own venom.

Petrification. The gaze of a basilisk kills any human in its path. I do not know if it applies additionally to other animals. Petrification cannot be nullified through the use of mirrors or other image-reflecting surfaces, though that does seem to reduce its lethality and cause the individual in question to merely be magically physically frozen in place. If my own biology is anything to go off of, basilisks contain a translucent eyelid which can nullify the petrification of their gaze while still allowing for them to utilize their eyes as sensory organs. I do not know if a basilisk’s gaze is nullified by its death.

Impenetrable Hide. Only powerful, magically enhanced weapons can slice through the scaled hide of a basilisk. Unenchanted or normally enhanced weapons bounce off, doing little if any damage. Swords, spears, arrows, and similar weapons are rendered functionally useless against anything but the basilisk’s open mouth and eyes.

Magical Capabilities. Basilisks which are several centuries old are rumored to be able to summon surrounding serpents and reptiles to defend and attack under their control as needed, even potentially summoning younger nearby basilisks, young wyrms and other draconics, and non-serpentine reptiles such as alligators. It is also said that some of these older basilisks can summon serpentine and reptilian creatures made from shadows.

Male basilisks, for reasons unknown, sprout feathered crests of bright colors atop their heads. These crests can come in a variety of shapes, sizes, colors, and orientations: my own crest is bright red, and circles around my jawline as well as partially down my back. These feathered crests can be moved up or down, typically doing so without active thought or effort on the basilisk's part. Feathers begin to manifest towards the end of adolescence and a full plumage indicates that the basilisk has matured and entered into young adulthood. Female basilisks may occasionally sprout small amounts of fringe feathers on their heads and backs, but they will not get anywhere near the decorative size of the male's plume and lack in articulation and movement. Female basilisks also tend towards being slightly bigger than male basilisks.

Basilisk courtship behavior exists, but due to the rarity of basilisks it is rarely ever preformed. Basilisks will seek out their mates using their scent-oriented sensory organs, their forked tongue most notably, traveling distances if their duty allows them to do so once the calling hits at some point in their adulthood. Upon finding another basilisk, the two will scent each other from afar, slowly winding in a clockwise circular motion towards each other. Then courtship begins: the more dominant basilisk will attempt to assert itself by raising itself high than the other as they twist around one another tighter and tighter, trying to keep their head on top of their desired partner's. If they can successfully complete the "dance" still above and assertive of their partner, the courtship is considered to be a success and the basilisk pair will seek a new home together. Basilisks typically mate in pairs or in groups of three, staying with the same partners for the entirety of their lives. Not all courtship rituals are successful, but basilisk courtship is rarely, if ever, fatal to either party.

Given that basilisks are presumed to be sterile and only created through ritual, it is unknown why this sexual dimorphism and its related courtship rituals exists. It may involve aspects that have to do with what makes us, but I am not privy to how one creates a basilisk except through extremely powerful, dangerous, and undoubtedly unethical magic ritual; I would not be surprised if there was some species recombination and mutation with pre-existing animals involved in it which would cause such, but I have no confirmation either way. Alternatively, it may be that basilisks are not sterile at all, but are so rare and so often die within the first century or two of their lifespans, that situational inability to mate and reproduce (combined with, perhaps, a gap between the age of maturity and the age in which a basilisk is capable of reproduction) has made it merely seem as though they lack any sort of egg-laying capabilities. I could not say factually one way or the other.

Because of the method of our creation, we also lack a species-wide natural or preferred ecological range, though basilisks often find ourselves drawn to bodies or water. This is

considered by some alchemists to be a part of our assumed niche in magical ecological systems, specifically in regards to phoenixes and our relationship with them.

We symbolically represent eternal life through unending immortality and continuation, and are thematically/mythologically considered linked to humans' forced taking of longevity in aggressive defiance of natural and necessary life cycles, as we are created through powerful magical rituals of which few are capable of and which typically render us bound to service throughout our long lifetimes. Because of this, we are diametrically opposed to phoenixes, which represent eternal life through rebirth and cyclic longevity, and are naturally occurring animals which typically choose to bond to specific humans throughout their lifetime. Basilisks are associated with water; phoenixes with fire. Basilisks are associated with death (and decay), phoenixes are associated with life (and healing). It is not rare for phoenix-chosen humans to be basilisk-slayers as well, because of this opposition; the one who killed me also fell into that dual-category, though stories exist of individuals also utilizing unicorns, dragons, giants, and supposedly some mythical species of large magical weasel to assist with basilisk-slaying.

Basilisks have no known natural predators, and in the wild only have to fear from competition and disputes with other large magical creatures, such as adult dragons. Due to their venom, gaze, and ability to suffocate and immobilize prey with their coils, basilisks have the ability to predate upon on a wide berth of animals, humans included. Thankfully an adult basilisk does not need to eat constantly; as an adult of just over a century old, my feeding schedule was approximately a cow every other month or two, and as I aged the time spent between meals would have further expanded. Part of the difficulty of basilisk-keeping, in addition to their longevity, is that feeding such a large animal regularly is an enormous financial burden.

On the topic of basilisk-keeping, a human I know has asked, "how do I tame a basilisk and make it my friend?" in the past. This is not something I wholly know. Or at least, the answer may not be so simple as to summarize it within a mere sentence of paragraph, though I will try my best.

It is not *impossible* to befriend a basilisk without being its creator, but it is functionally a lifelong and potentially suicidal endeavor. The first difficulty to surmount is actually finding a basilisk. Even the most powerful and adventurous individuals will likely go the entirety of their lives without catching a glimpse of a basilisk, due to both the incredible rarity of the species and to the secretive duties most basilisks are bound by.

Approaching a duty-bound basilisk is deeply dangerous: adult basilisks are often used as guardians of valuable locations and magical artifacts. That is to say, their duty is to kill any who approach, which makes approaching them difficult at best. If one is employed by the basilisk's creator for the basilisk's care or similar purposes which would allow for them to safely approach the basilisk or the location/artifact which the basilisk guards, then approach is less of an issue.

Approaching a wild basilisk or mated pair/trio of basilisks is, ironically, less dangerous in some aspects. The best way to do such would likely be to approach the empty territory or home of the basilisk(s) and leave recognizable scent markers: clothing, blankets, and similar regularly-used items over a time period of several months. Once a wild basilisk has become familiar with one's scent, is it significantly less likely to view them as a potential threat or intrusion into its territory and may instead view them as it would any other animal native to its home area, allowing for the human to actually see the basilisk in-person with a lesser risk of petrification. The individual still runs the risk of potentially getting devoured if the basilisk in question is a young adult, but older adult basilisks will typically opt for larger animals as their preferred prey, helping to mitigate that concern.

Basilisks are intelligent animals who can learn to understand spoken language to some degree. Talking to (or at) a basilisk and bringing it food regularly is the easiest way to familiarize the basilisk with you on a more intimate and personalized level, and I use myself as a prime example of the effectiveness of this strategy: my fondest memories are of my creator-appointed handler, an alchemist by the name of Alexia, and the way she would often talk to me about the politics of the land and of her own life/work as she would go about measuring my scales, feathers, and fangs and other work. While basilisks do not have "friends" in the same way humans do, I can confirm that I felt a fondness for her that would have spurred me to voluntary action should she have needed it, something I cannot say applied to anyone else I knew in that lifetime.

A basilisk that one has befriended will not serve the individual as it would its creator, but can be helpful and useful in other ways. Wild basilisks will be unlikely to move to become locational guardians, but can likely be persuaded to give particular territorial concerns to important areas that are already incorporated into their claimed territory; similarly, it is not all that far-fetched to leave a particularly valuable item in the den of a wild basilisk you have befriended in order to benefit from their presence to dissuade potential thieves. Basilisk body parts also make for powerful alchemic ingredients, and befriended basilisks can potentially be convinced, or trained, to part with scales, blood, and feathers.