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The Spectre Hound

By Susanna Duffy

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by: **Susanna Duffy**

And a dreadful thing from the cliff did spring,
and its wild bark thrill'd around,
His eyes had the glow of the fires below,
'twas the form of the spectre hound

One of the most chilling omens of death in English folklore is the large, spectral demon dog called Black Shuck. A death omen comes to collect souls and if you have the misfortune to see Black Shuck – expect death to come within a year.

Ghostly Black Dogs are distinguished from normal flesh and blood black dogs by their large yellow or red glowing eyes (sometimes only one), and their ability to appear out of thin air, or into and out of the ground. The demon dog is about the size of a calf and sometimes even appears headless !

When the Black Shuck comes to claim his victims his bone-chilling howls can be heard rising above the wind. His feet make no sound, but people can feel his hot breath on their necks.

A common place to see the Black Dog is at a boundary. He lurks where people move from one locality to another, roads, footpaths, old trackways, bridges, crossroads, gates, doors, stairs and corridors. He can be seen near graveyards and barrows, along Leylines, and running down Corpse Ways or Spirit Paths. Folklore tells us that these ancient paths used to run to churches and spirits would travel along them from graveyard to graveyard.

In the 1890s, a teenage boy rescued from the North Sea told how he had been forced to swim further and further from the shore by a huge dog that chased him through the waters, its teeth gnashing at his neck and shoulders. In the 1920s and 30s, fishermen off Sheringham told of hearing the hound's howling on stormy nights. And as recently as the 1970s, he was seen pounding over the beach at Yarmouth.

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Black Shuck is not confined to Norfolk. Another location is along the Sussex Downs with its old burial mounds, once the principal means of travel before the weald was cleared of its impenetrable forest. And once, on a summer afternoon in 1577, he made a fateful trip across the border into Suffolk and attacked the congregation of St Mary's Church in Bungay. As the dreadful dog flew from the church, sated with blood, he is said to have left deep scorch marks on the door.

In 1933 the door was cleaned and burn marks were there for all to see. They remain there to this day.

There are many names for this terrifying visitor. Galleytrot, Shug Monkey, the Hateful Thing, Hell beast, Skeff or Moddey Dhoo and in the south of England you will hear names like Yeth or Wish Hounds. In Yorkshire he is known as The Barguest.

The name Shuck seems to go back to Old English (at least pre-1000 BCE). The Old English epic poem

Beowulf describes the monster Grendel and his mother. Grendel is called a Scucca (demon)– and Scucc would have been pronounced pretty much then as it is today. The poem also says of Grendel that him of eagum stod ligge gelicost leoht unfaeget , 'a fire-like, baleful light shone from his eyes', Sounds like the Black Shuck to me.

The origins of the Black Dog have been lost in the mists of time but most likely originated from the Vikings who feared the hound of their god Odin All-Father, and brought their tales and lore to England. The word Barguest comes from the German 'Bargeist' meaning 'spirit of the (funeral) bier'.

In the folklore of old Europe, the dog is seen as both the guardian and consumer of dead spirits, as in the 'Wild Hunt' where a pack of dogs with a master of the hunt flies through the sky looking for lost souls. He also turns up in Egypt, Siberia, and North America. According to the Vedic mythology of ancient India, the dead must pass by the four-eyed dogs of Yama, king of the dead, and Greek mythology tells of the dog Cerberus, popularly endowed with three heads, who watches the entrance to Hades and there is the Egyptian Anubis, with the head of a dog. The Celts have their legends also, of white, red-eared hounds. But the concept of the underworld watchdog reached its fullest and most complex expression among the Germanic peoples.

Whatever the origin of the Black Dog, beware of him, he is still to be found in the wild lonely places of North England today.

Susanna Duffy is a Civil Celebrant, folklorist and storyteller who creates rites and ceremonies for the milestones of life

Know Your Afghan Hound

By Dakota Dog

The Afghan Hound is a medium to large 55 to 65 pound dog that grows to between 24 and 29" in height. The Afghan Hound has long, silky hair and appears to be both elegant, reserved and agile. But,

The Spectre Hound

don't let the looks fool you. They can run, frolic and play with the best of the dogs.

Afghan Hounds comes in a variety of colors including Black, red, cream, fawn and brindle. Fawn, cream and brindle Afghans typically have a black mask on face or on fringe of ears. White markings are discouraged by the AKC. In contrast to the long hair on its body, the Afghan Hound has a long, thin tail that curls on the end and is covered with short hair. Because of their long, thick hair, the Afghan Hound requires regular grooming.

They are very energetic and affectionate dogs. They get along with children, other dogs and pets, especially those that they know from puppyhood. They do not always get along with cats, especially those that they aren't familiar with. Some Afghan Hounds can be more on the timid or high strung side, so they are recommended more for older or well behaved children. The Afghan Hound is an ideal dog for homes where they will get plenty of exercise, outside play and where there is ample room to roam and explore.

The breed can date itself back over 5000 years. It is native to Afghanistan. It is a sight hound and was originally used for herding, hunting and as a watchdog. Due to its quick speed, it made an excellent hunting animal to pursue game. It only reached Europe and the United States in the 1900s because its exportation was prohibited. The Afghan Hound is now used mainly as companion, watchdog and hunting dog.

This dog with a dignified air is a loyal and faithful companion. They make good watchdogs and a great companion for an active family that enjoys exercise and play. If you choose an Afghan then plan on a lifetime of love and enjoyment from your new pet.

Dakota Dog is the owner of

and its sister dog blog

You can also learn more about the Afghan Hound at

in our dog breeds section.

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