

Movie: The Fog (1980)

Synopsis

The Fog is a film directed by John Carpenter told as a campfire tale about a town haunted by corpses from a 100-year-old shipwreck. The fishermen's legend foretells at midnight on April 21, when the fog rolls in, the corpses will arise from the sea in search of the campfire that originally "lead them to their dark, icy death."

The movie is set in Spivey Point, 1980, where local fishermen spot a ghost ship carrying corporeal undead. While the US culture has focused on vampires, skeletons, mummies, and zombies, *The Fog* likely depicts undead fiends from Norse mythology; draugrs. Literally "after-walker," draugrs are undead creatures that guard treasures after death (derivation of the term *Dragon*). Draugrs rise from the grave as wisps of fog, and possess superhuman strength, the ability to control the weather, and the ability to curse a victim.

The ability to curse a victim is the major theme of another nautical tale: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, a Samuel Taylor Coleridge poem inspired by the Flying Dutchman, a ghost ship captained by Vanderdecken. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, a ship encounters the ghostly Flying Dutchman. On board are Death (actually, the undead; a skeleton) and the "Life-in-Death" (a deathly-pale woman) playing dice for the souls of the crew. Life-in-Death wins the life of the Mariner; he will endure a fate worse than death as punishment for his offense (killing the albatross). As penance for shooting the albatross, the Mariner is forced to wander the earth and tell his story, teaching a lesson to those he meets.

In Coleridge's poem, the Mariner is cursed by Life-in-Death for killing an albatross. In Carpenter's adaptation, the town of Antonio Bay is cursed for its own "albatross"; in 1880, 6 of the town founders deliberately sank a clipper ship named the *Elizabeth Dane*. The ship was owned by a wealthy man named Blake, who wanted to establish a leper colony near Antonio Bay. One foggy night, the 6 conspirators lit a fire on the beach near treacherous rocks. Deceived by the false beacon, the ship crashed into the rocks and perished.

On the centennial anniversary of the Antonio Bay, a local radio DJ is given a piece of driftwood inscribed with the word "DANE." In addition to being the name of the ill-fated ship, the inscription also establishes Norse mythology as the origin of the curse. To establish the town charter, the 6 townspeople plundered the wrecked ship. As guardians of treasures after death, draugrs will exact revenge on the descendants who murdered, plundered, and founded the town of Antonio Bay.

How it relates to the field of psychiatry

Since *The Fog* is told as a campfire tale, the storyteller's character parallels that of the Mariner who was forced to wander the earth and tell his story. The storyteller's cautionary tale is that we are the product of our early experiences. While set in the fictional town of Spivey Point, the story's real setting is the vast ocean and all of its mystery. Just as all the danger lies below the ocean's surface, so too do our early experiences shape our unconscious (subcortical hippocampus and amygdala).

Key Words: The Fog, Antonio Bay, corporeal undead, Norse mythology, draugrs, dragons, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Flying Dutchman*, Life-in-Death, Elizabeth Dane, hippocampus, amygdala

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