

# The dire wolf

Religion



The Dire Wolf The species that is known as the dire wolf is a large and powerful ancestor of modern wolves and dogs which is now extinct. It has, however, left a rich legacy in myths and legends across many northern countries where it once roamed as one of the most feared predators of all time. This paper traces the way that the dire wolf has been represented in myths and legends of the past, and also in the stories, films and computer video games of the modern world. The exact species which gave rise to all the legends is the *Canis dirus* and it lived in the Pleistocene Epoch (2.6 million to 11,700 years ago) in both North and South America (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2012, p. 1). It was considerably larger than the modern gray wolf, and had a bigger skull with a smaller brain. Like the modern wolf, it had light limbs suitable for covering long distances. Fossil remains have been located in various sites and scientists are able to form an accurate picture of its stature and likely habits. One of the earliest mentions of the dire wolf in fiction is found in the old Norse myths about gods and magical creatures which reflected the harsh landscapes of Scandinavia in the tenth to thirteenth centuries. The dire wolves in this tale are given names such as Fenrir, Skoll and Hati and they are endowed with supernatural powers. They are respected for their power to punish people, and they threaten even the Norse gods, since Fenrir kills the god Odin in the Edda story and has to be tied up by a magic rope to await the twilight of the gods (Larrington, 2008, p. 98). For this reason wolves in Norse fiction were both admired and feared. In American fiction the wolf is likewise a creature of mystery and power, and the dire wolf is the most fearful imaginable version of this species. In the Western genre countless films and stories feature the lonely sound of the wolf, calling out to its kind and instilling a sense of fear

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and foreboding in human beings, both for their own safety and because of the tendency of the wolf to cruelly kill and maim domestic animals. In the television film series “ Game of Thrones” which is based on the novels of George R. Martin a noble family is in charge of the last remaining puppies from this fearful breed, and instead of destroying them, in order to protect the human race from the awful fear of dire wolves, they each take one and look after it, thus sustaining the dire wolf to live on in human history beyond its near extinction. The tale is of course fantasy, but the dire wolf is a symbol of the wildness and freedom of the far northern territories. It represents a life close to nature, but also liable to incidents of great danger and, if necessary, cruelty. The popularity the television series, and of Martin’s books before that, suggests that there is a gap in modern culture that the image of the legendary dire wolf is able to fill. With the advent of one of the world’s most popular role-playing video games, World of Warcraft, the dire wolf has found a new lease of life as one of the many mystical beasts that roam the medieval-style virtual world. Human players adopt characters and roles, and it is possible to kill a dire wolf after about level 9 or 10, and eventually also to train one as a pet, or conjure one up as a spirit to help in battles. Players encounter more dangerous dire wolf variants later in the game. The Orc faction can use dire wolves as a mount, and travel from place to place in the game on the back of this fearful beast. The game mechanics have built in a tendency of dire wolves to call for reinforcements from their pack, which makes them a formidable enemy, even for teams of players. This game shows the dire wolf as both a fearful enemy and a loyal fighter in battle, and this reflects an appreciation of its qualities to contribute towards good or evil outcomes. In the music genre, the band “ Grateful Dead” immortalized the <https://assignbuster.com/the-dire-wolf/>

dire wolf as “ six hundred pounds of sin” which was grinning outside the window at a hard-drinking, hard-gambling man. The chorus of the song “ don’t murder me” implies that the dire wolf has come to take the man’s life. The dire wolf symbolizes all the wrong that a person has done in the past, and the likelihood that cruel retribution will come one day. These examples outlined above have shown that the dire wolf has maintained its fascination for human beings long after its extinction. Its combination of force, cruelty and cunning, along with enormous size, and tendency to roam in packs serve as an example of power even in very harsh conditions. It has connotations of majesty, and also cruelty, especially when dealing out justice and revenge. Even in the twenty first century it has the power to cast fear into our modern imagination. References Encyclopaedia Britannica. “ Dire wolf”. 2012. Retrieved from: . [Accessed 18 November 2012]. Web. Game of Thrones. Developed by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss. United States: HBO, 2011. Television film series. Grateful Dead “ Dire Wolf” No date. Song Lyric. Retrieved from [Accessed 18 November 2012]. Web. Larrington, Carolyne. The Poetic Edda. New York: Oxford, 2008. Print. Martin, George R. R. A Song of Ice and Fire. (7 volumes). New York: Bantam, 1996-2012. Print. World of Warcraft. Blizzard Entertainment, 2004-2012. Video game.