

# Beasts of the Deep

## Sea Creatures and Popular Culture

Edited by  
Jon Hackett and Seán Harrington

*Beasts of the Deep: Sea Creatures and Popular Culture* offers its readers an in-depth and interdisciplinary engagement with the sea and its monstrous inhabitants, through critical readings of folklore, weird fiction, film, music, radio and digital games.

Within the text there are a multitude of convergent critical perspectives used to engage and explore fictional and real monsters of the sea in media and folklore. The collection features chapters from a variety of academic perspectives; postmodernism, psychoanalysis, industrial-organisational analysis, fandom studies, sociology and philosophy are featured. Under examination are a wide range of narratives and media forms that represent, reimagine and create the Kraken, mermaids, giant sharks, sea draughts and even the weird creatures of H.P. Lovecraft.

*Beasts of the Deep* offers an expansive study of our sea-born fears and anxieties, that are crystallised in a variety of monstrous forms. Repeatedly the chapters in the collection encounter the contemporary relevance of our fears of the sea and its inhabitants – through the dehumanising media depictions of refugees in the Mediterranean to ecological disasters, pollution and the threat of mass marine extinction.

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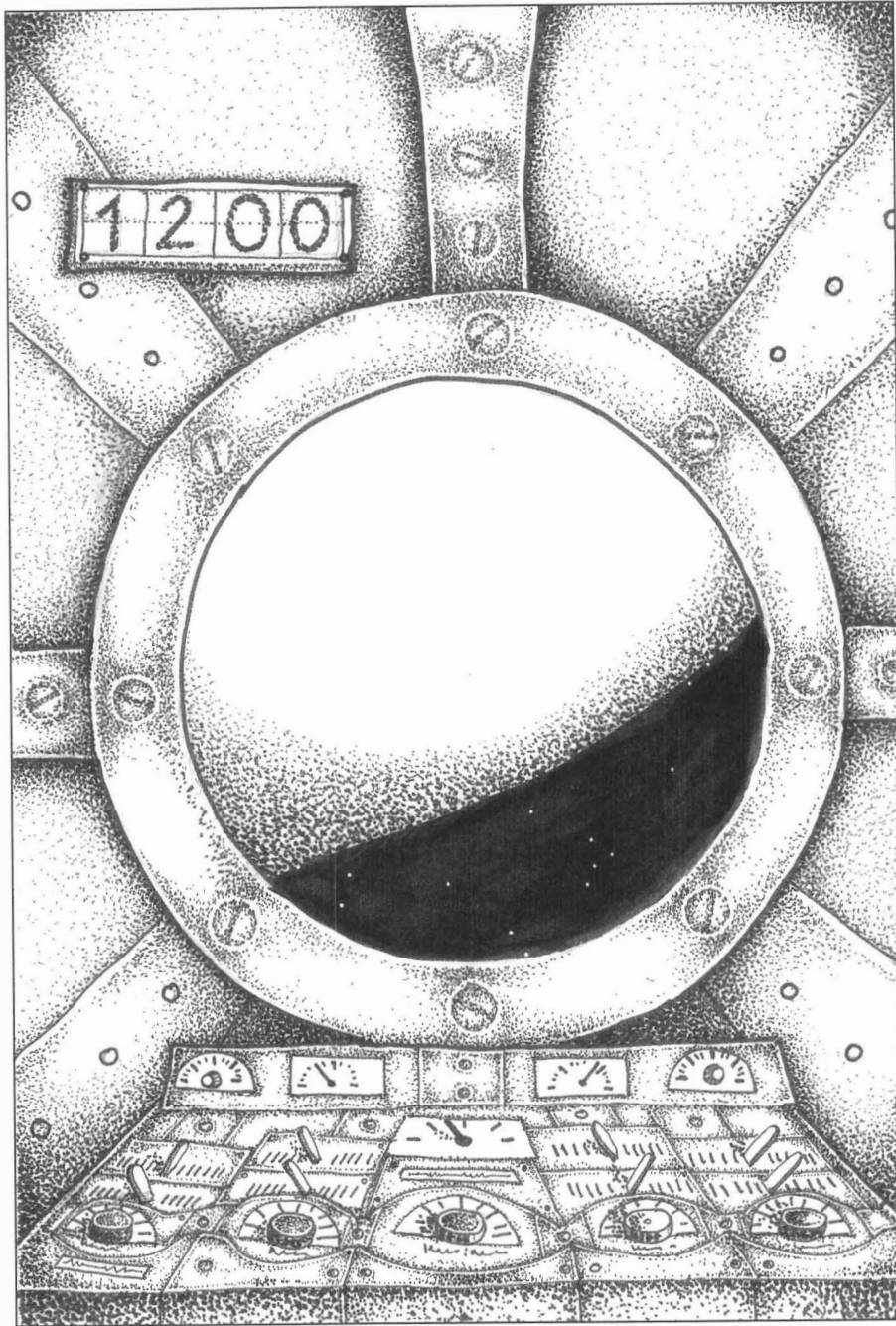
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## Chapter 1

# “From Beneath the Waves”: Sea-Draugr and the Popular Conscience

Alexander Hay

The sea looms large in human psychology, both as a source of guilt and its metaphor. As Joseph Conrad noted, the sea has never been “friendly to man” (Conrad 1907), nor has it shown generosity towards him or time for any of his professed values. Fittingly, Conrad’s *Pincher Martin* had its protagonist undergo a purgatorial experience as he drowns in the sea, his ‘survival’ an extended penance where his guilt and sins are scourged (Sinclair 1982, pp.175–177).

For Coleridge’s ancient mariner, meanwhile, the sea is a place of unending dread and a guilty conscience that cannot be absolved. As Miall has observed, the sea was the stage upon which Coleridge explored his own sense of guilt, haunted by the death of his father and a looming sense of some unfathomable judgement for sins committed (Miall 1984, pp.639–640).

Just as significantly, the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1908) features walking corpses, in the form of the reanimated crewmates of the mariner, brought back to life once he admits his sins, who then steer his ship back to land. The Mariner himself is now the property of Life-in-Death, a sinister female figure that condemns him to a living death of his own, doomed to tell his story forever more. As the chapter will argue, this juxtaposition of reanimated corpses, guilt and the sea has become a recurring motif in popular culture, a means whereby guilt is confronted though not always resolved.

Walking corpses and the restless dead have, of course, been prominent in recent decades as metaphors and means of satire. As representations of mindless conformity and relentless social conflict, zombies are of course one such example. Though recently neutered in potency by over-exposure and their relegation to the rank of ‘macguffin’ for soap opera and sadistic, faintly right wing survival fantasies, as most notably depicted in *The Walking Dead* comic book and its attendant spin-off media.

Vengeful aquatic spirits are a common theme in horror films, as are tortured souls in need of salvation: in *The Devil’s Backbone* (2001), we have a juxta-

position of both, as is the case with *Ringu* (1998), though both involve a well as both crime scene and root of the ensuing horror, rather than the sea per se.

As this paper will discuss, however, the *Sea-Draugr* not only combines these but also demonstrates a recurring reckoning with guilt and its consequences. This has become more subliminal over time, to the extent that we have *Sea-Draugr* in function if not form, where there is no reanimated corpse per se, but there is a substitution that serves the same role. In other cases, the presence of *Sea-Draugr* swings towards the other direction, where these creatures are *Sea-Draugr* not only in function but in all but name. They have even begun to manifest themselves in our news media and press coverage, where depictions of disasters and tragedies at sea have strange parallels to the drowned dead and their role as both conscience and nemesis.

### *Sea-Draugr* and other revenants

What, however, is a *Sea-Draugr*? The archetype that will now be discussed is what can be best described as the *Draugr*, or reanimated corpse, an invariably malignant and dangerous reanimated corpse that figures large in Scandinavian mythology. They are sentient, calculating, cannibalistic objects of fear (Chadwick June 1946a, p.50). *Draugr* spread diseases and grow long talons. They inhabit their barrows, often full of treasure, and violently resist any tomb robbers. Those slain by a *Draugr* are sometimes bound to their killer as enslaved ghosts (Jakobsson 2009, p.310). Unlike their mainland counterparts, Icelandic *Draugr* are free-roaming, able to roam far from their barrows and pose a threat to any human they encounter, though a certain mischievousness means they may sometimes grant a gift rather than a violent death onto their victims (Chadwick 1946a, pp.54–55). They are fearsome foes, often requiring a ritualistic means of exorcism to be fully quelled. This ranges from being decapitated with their own sword, to being wrestled into submission, to being staked through the heart, and incineration – their ashes scattered, significantly, into the sea (Andrews 1913, p.48, Keyworth 2006, p.244, Chadwick 1946a, p.55).

While primarily land-based *Draugr* come in another variety, however, namely that of a drowned seafarer. A particularly vivid example of this is given in *Eyrbyggja saga* (Morris and Magnusson 1892), where a seafarer named Thorod Scat-Catcher and his men drown in mysterious circumstances. Their ship and its catch of fish are found but with none of its crew. Yet at their burial feast the drowned crew appear dripping with water, and take up their seats. At first they are welcomed but when they continue to appear in the subsequent evenings, now joined by another group of undead, they cause the mortal men to flee in horror, and subsequently cause the outbreak of an un-named sickness.

In response to this, the living organise a *Thing*, or court, and proceed to pass judgement on each of the *Draugr* who each say, in mitigation, that they had

simply remained for as long as they could, before heading off into the night. Thorod himself states, rather caustically, that since he and his men are no longer welcome, they will go somewhere else instead. The dead no longer return and the sickness passes.

Unlike typical *Draugr*, these drowned men are not directly malign, though their presence causes, unintentionally, much trouble for the living. Instead, they seem sympathetic and willingly depart when told to go (One doubts a normal *Draugr* would be so accommodating, somehow). One interpretation of this story is as a metaphor for remembrance – of lost friends and acquaintances whose ongoing memory causes distress. The only way to be rid of them is to objectify them and their memory, in this case through a legal process. By passing sentence, the *Thing* drives the *Sea-Draugr* away, but their dignified response to this, and their own (not entirely unjustified) parting words suggest this is not in itself an answer. There is a comedic quality to the scenario, but also a melancholic one. Thorod and his peers seem to say “you can’t forget us, even if you try.” Here the real antagonist is the urge to forget those who have passed, to trivialise bereavement through omission. Perhaps it is fitting then that one way to drive off the undead in the Icelandic sagas is to verbally abuse and scold them – the troubling memories of the dead swept away by a wilful desecration of their memory.

Another alternative to dealing with *Sea-Draugr* is demonstrated in *Laxdæla saga* (Press 1880); here one protagonist, Gudrun, loses her husband and crew to drowning. On her way to church one evening she sees her husband, resurrected, along with his crew, but refuses to speak to them. Instead she goes into church “as long as it seemed good to her”, only to find that her returned husband and crew had disappeared. Prior to this, she had repelled another ghost by insulting him. Gudrun’s response to the affair is to embrace Christianity even further, digging up the remains and effects of an evil wizard and eventually becoming a nun and hermit. Despite this, she “lived in such sorrow and grief” and when pressed by her son as to which of her dead husbands she loved the most, she replies, enigmatically: “to him I was worst whom I loved best.” Again, the notion of guilt, loss and mourning are subsumed by a dismissal, even a purging of the dead, and immersion in faith and the rejection of a troubling pagan past. Yet, as the saga observes, even this does not grant Gudrun peace. Jakobsson (2011, p.30) refers to the actions of these undead as being in the grip of ‘spectral selfishness’, though this underestimates a desperate need to relieve oneself of grief and the post hoc rationalisations that requires.

Another trait of *Sea-Draugr*, as this paper will discuss later, is how their idea can spread, adapt and yet retain their essential meaning. This has led to the more recent Norwegian myth of the *Draug*, which, as the name suggests, reflects a cross-pollination within Scandinavian cultures (Jordahl 1975, p.12). *Draug*, according to the Folklore of North Eastern Norway, are the reanimated remains of drowned fishermen, often headless or with heads

replaced by seaweed. They are invariably omens of impending disaster, or agencies of it, and in one particular legend have been said to rise from the depths en-masse to wage war against land-dwelling ghosts or perhaps *Draugs*, who are closer in form and function to their traditional Icelandic equivalents. Interestingly, in this folktale, the land ghosts or *Draugr* prevail, having emerged from a Christian churchyard, a heavily symbolic clash between an orderly, ritualised death, in the form of a Christian burial, and the ambivalent horror of being lost at sea, and so unable to be disposed of in a decent fashion. Again, this can be read as an attempt to address deep-seated fears and anxieties. For coastal communities, losing sons, fathers, brothers and husbands at sea was an all too regular occurrence. The story ends with the caveat that the *Sea-Draugr* never return, which appears to be wishful thinking. After all, the story does not say they have been destroyed, but merely driven back. Mourning, guilt and lives ended before their proper resolution can be pushed aside, but they cannot be completely dismissed.

Another *Draug* narrative features a family pursued in a boat by another, this time piloted by a *Draug*. All attempts to outrun the other boat fail, and the entire family is washed away bar one child who manages to cling on until rescued (Jordahl, p.15). Interestingly, the boy later marries the family's servant girl and never goes to sea again, a poignant juxtaposition of survivor's guilt and the urge to move away from grief by avoidance and forgetfulness. The boy, let us not forget, has created a new family and a new life, but only by avoiding the source of the original trauma – the place where the *Draug* lurk – does he managed to elude his bereavement.

In many ways, of course, the traditional *Draugr* and their surrounding mythology are not that far removed from the *Sea-Draugr* either. The archetypical *Draugr* is huge, bloated and either pale or black (Keyworth 2006, p.244). In other words, they more closely resemble the distended corpses of the drowned than the withered, rotted or skeletonised contents of barrows. Perhaps this was due to the nature of death in Iceland where corpses were buried as soon as feasible, but where, like Norway, an altogether more grisly sight could be found washed up on a beach at any time.

This is not the only connection with the sea that land-based *Draugr* demonstrate. Many barrows and pre-Christian burial sites were either on the Icelandic coast or close by (Vesteinsson 2011, p.42). Beaches were the scenes of executions, such as hangings (Chadwick 1946b, p. 126). Even some of the means of disposing of *Draugr* had a maritime element, with the ashes of a slain (or rather, re-slain) *Draugr* being thrown into the sea as a final act of exorcism (Ellis Davidson 1968, p.38). Water was also seen as a place where valuable objects could be obtained, whether it be a mighty sword from the stomach of a fish (Andrews 1913, p. 627), or gifts awarded for saving a troll's child from drowning (Simpson 1966, p.5).

However, how did the *Sea-Draugr* continue its journey, or perhaps rampage,

into modern popular culture? Certainly, the Icelandic aspect of the myth continued into the early modern period, with reports of *Draugr* being made as late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Keyworth 2006, p.246). The Old English poem *Beowulf* (Hall 1892) suggests one route. The cannibalistic monster, Grendel, resembles a *Draugr* in terms of his predatory behaviour, cunning and physical monstrosity. Aspects of the *Sea-Draugr* meanwhile, can be seen in the titular hero's diving down to the bottom of the lake to finally vanquish the monster and his mother. Similarly, the pathos and surprisingly sympathetic aspect of the mother echoes aspects of themes already discussed – of regret, mourning and pain:

“Known unto earth-folk, that still an avenger  
Outlived the loathed one, long since the sorrow  
Caused by the struggle; the mother of Grendel,  
Devil-shaped woman, her woe ever minded,  
Who was held to inhabit the horrible waters,” (Hall 1892)

With both mother and son disposed of, *Beowulf* later dies in battle fighting against a dragon threatening his kingdom. He is buried in a barrow, perhaps significantly, overlooking the sea. Though his soul may be at rest, the poem nonetheless laments his loss:

“Thus made their mourning the men of Geatland,  
For their hero's passing his hearth-companions:  
Quoth that of all the kings of earth,  
Of men he was mildest and most beloved,  
To his kin the kindest, keenest for praise.” (Ibid)

Parallels can therefore be made between *Beowulf* and *Sea-Draugr* narratives. Nonetheless, there is one challenge to this reading; the poem may have been composed as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> Century (Clark 2009, pp.678–679), and written down in manuscript form in the 10<sup>th</sup> or early 11<sup>th</sup> Century AD (Vandersall 1972, p.10). By contrast, Iceland was only permanently settled for the first time in the late 9<sup>th</sup> Century (Byock et al 2005, p. 198), and the Icelandic sagas recorded in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century onwards (Ólason and Tómasson 2006, p.125). How, then, can it be said that *Beowulf* spread the idea of the *Sea-Draugr*? Both should instead be seen as stemming from an original myth and set of cultural motifs that were expressed in one form in Iceland and another in Old English. Indeed, it is the similarities that are most interesting here; the spread of a series of sinister maritime and personal traumas with their roots in a shared Scandinavian experience. As Kiessling (1968, p.201) has argued, Grendel's description as a *Maere*, or night monster, has shared roots with the Icelandic *Mara*, or night demon, and the Old English *Mare*, or latterly, *Nightmare*.

One other route of transmission was through Scotland. In *Grettis saga*, witch fire is described as burning above the barrow of a powerful *Draugr*: This was a sign of a supernatural, and malign presence. In Scottish folklore, mean-

while, strange lights at sea were seen as harbingers of a death by drowning, with the lights often also signifying where a drowned body could be found floating (Maclagan 1897, p. 211). At other times, the lights not only foretold a death but were accompanied by a physical haunting:

Further, the whole family, father, mother, and several sons and daughters, respectable and reliable persons, assert that during that season, for a good while before the drowning accident, they over and over again heard rapping at the door, not one, but all of them; and when they went to the door, no one was to be seen (Maclagan, p.216).

Again, a death by drowning is accompanied by a dread and a supernatural horror that seems to represent a deeper sense of grief and foreboding. Another example of Scottish folklore echoing *Sea-Draugr* motifs is the folk song, 'The Wife of Usher's Well'. First collected in 1802, where the titular wife's three sons die after she had "sent them over the sea", and who return like the *Sea-Draugr* of *Eyrbyggja saga*, after she vows neither the wind nor the flood will stop until her sons return "in earthly flesh and blood." This happens one night, and the three sons appear at their mother's house. Sadly, for the Wife, this is for one night only, and her sons leave once more the following morning, departing with an apology, and some flirting with "the bonny lass" who tends their mother's fire. As in *Eyrbyggja saga*, the returning dead have died at sea and gather around a fire. There are, of course, differences – the sons leave reluctantly after only one night and it is plain that their mother would rather they stayed, unlike the still-living Icelanders and their gate-crashing *Sea-Draugr*. Nonetheless, the themes are the same – loss, guilt, heartbreak, mourning and an inability to let the dead go. Similarly, the means are similar – the dead walk, though they are not malign, and they must all be laid to rest or at least sent on despite the regrets they feel. In both examples, the process of grieving is demonstrated as neither without end nor, ultimately, relief. The main difference is that the three sons leave on a bittersweet note, while the *Sea-Draugr* leave with sour humour.

When did the *Sea-Draugr* archetype enter the modern popular conscience, however? As the examples of Coleridge or Edgar Allen Poe's *Manuscript Found In A Bottle* (1833), with its crew of ancient, wizened sailors "with unquiet and tremulous step" heading towards their doom, he was not alone in exploring these themes and archetypes. In short stories such as *Oh, Whistle, And I'll Come To You, My Lad* (1904) and *A Warning To The Curious* (1925), with their evil spirits able to take physical form, tomb robbing and their coastal settings, MR James also demonstrated a possible influence.

However, as the next section will discuss modern *Sea-Draugr* are far more overt. Their aquatic nature is as pronounced as the personal tragedy they embody.

### Modern *Sea-Draugr* in all but name

As said earlier, modern *Sea-Draugr* come in two forms. Firstly, there are the ones that closely resemble the classic archetype in terms of how they function, their role in the plot of a story and their physicality. While they may deviate from the original *Sea-Draugr* template in some ways, there are clear parallels between them and their antecedents. What they all share in common, with some exceptions, are the following features: they are walking corpses or can manifest in such a way; they show intelligence, signs of personality and malicious intent; and thirdly they are symbolic representations of repressed guilt or justice for unjust acts. Finally, while they can be driven off or contained, they remain as either a threat or an ongoing blot on the conscience of their mortal counterparts.

One clear example of this is John Carpenter's 1980 film, *The Fog*. Here a coastal community, about to celebrate its centenary, is assailed by the dead spirits of lepers who were murdered on board their ship. The wealth plundered from the wreck is then used to found the town which is now under attack. Like *Draugr* and *Sea-Draugr*, they are a corporeal menace and are capable of violently killing their victims through brute force, in a fashion that would not be out of place in an Icelandic saga. While they materialise from the titular fog and can, it is implied, dematerialise back into it at will, there are precedents for this in *Draugr* mythology. For example, in *Laxdæla saga* one *Draugr* evades his human opponent by merging into the earth, while it is also implied that other *Draugr* can move through the stones of their barrows via a kind of elemental intangibility. Another trait the vengeful spirits share with *Draugr* is their ability to reanimate the corpses of their victims or spread their curse onto them, albeit temporarily in the case of the lepers (Jakobsson 2009. p.310). Finally, the lepers can be driven off like *Sea-Draugr* by either Christian rituals or acts. In *The Fog*, the lepers vanish after seizing a cross in a church made from the stolen gold. In *Laxdæla saga*, as we have seen, Gudrun's Christianity wards off the *Sea-Draugr* her husband has become, while the previously mentioned clash between the Norwegian *Draug* and the Christian ghosts is another case in point. Ironically, the last victim of the lepers is the priest of the church, himself a descendant of the original murderers, who is claimed after the threat has apparently been vanquished. A local disc-jockey, having held off the lepers, meanwhile broadcasts a warning that the fog remains a threat. Here the implied peril of the *Sea-Draugr* is made explicit – your guilt and shame will come back to haunt you, regardless of how hard you try to avoid it.

Another example is George A. Romero's 2005 instalment of his zombie series *Land of the Dead*. The film continues to develop the concept of zombies reacquiring some degree of intellect, selfhood and morality, as first introduced in the series' previous film *Day of the Dead* (1985). *Land of the Dead* has a sapient (awakened?) zombie called Big Daddy who unites an army of fellow zombies, some more mindless than others, to take a bloody revenge



on the human enclave that had attacked their town. Where the similarities between these zombies and *Sea-Draugr* become clear is in one major scene, where Big Daddy leads his army into the river which blocks their passage, across its bed and then, in a scene that could be described as a perfect depiction of *Sea-Draugr* rising from the depths, emerging en masse at the other side. While this scene involves a large, deep river (to be precise, the Ohio River) rather than the sea, the scene nonetheless has a maritime flavour in that the night-time setting of the scene and the surrounding darkness remove all context from the water. This could be a river near you, or an estuary, or a beach. The zombies then proceed to wreak bloody vengeance on the humans, not entirely wiping them out but certainly destroying their corrupt ruling elite. Scores settled, Big Daddy and his zombies return home, being spared by the protagonists who realise they have more in common than they may have otherwise admitted.

This has all the typical aspects of a *Sea-Draugr* narrative – the zombies represent not only a repressed underclass but also guilt and repressed mourning. One cannot, after all, mourn a dead body when it is trying to eat you, nor in a world with few survivors can one easily set aside the horror that has befallen the world, and the shame of surviving where others have not. Of course, there are many innocent victims in the zombie assault too; like all good *Sea-Draugr* stories, the undead creatures emerging from the depths bring about as much harm as catharsis until they are finally sent on their way.

Another example comes in the form of a computer game. Red Hook's *Darkest Dungeon* (2016). In this dark fantasy RPG, you lead a band of dysfunctional and damaged, or morally dubious, adventurers in an attempt to restore the lands of your ancestor and undo the harm his arcane experiments have left behind. The ghost of the ancestor provides both narration and a Greek chorus of sorts as you heal the family estate and do your best to preserve the mental and physical health of your adventurers. In that sense alone – facing up to previous sins and traumas – the game has resonance, though it slowly emerges that the ancestor is a monstrous psychopath in his own right and the emissary of the ultimate evil that lurks beneath the surface of the ruined family manor.

Most significant however is one of the levels in the game – The Cove. This aquatically themed dungeon not only has all manner of 'pelagic nightmares' – based on Lovecraft's Deep Ones – and other oceanic monsters to fight, but, specifically, its own *Sea-Draugr*. These come in two varieties – the first of these is the 'Drowned Thrall', a bloated carcass that shows all the signs of having been in the water for a long time, but also a considerable resemblance to both *Draugr* and *Sea-Draugr*. In addition to causing both physical harm and mental trauma to the player's adventurers through its 'Gargling Grab', the Drowned Thrall also has another attack. Igniting the putrid gases that have built up in its swollen body, the thing explodes, causing massive

damage. Interestingly, this attack is referred to as 'The Revenge' – the implication being that this was once a sailor, abandoned and drowned and now returned, seeking vengeance on the landlubbers that left him to rot.

The other version of *Sea-Draugr* in the game comes in the form of 'The Sodden Crew'. This is a ship's crew, once hired by the ancestor to discreetly deliver some of his more dubious artefacts and occult material, but who fell out of his favour after demanding more money for their continued silence. The ancestor instead placed a hex on their anchor, dragging their ship down to the depths and drowning them. Reanimated either by the injustice of their betrayal or a side effect of the curse, or a combination of both, they return, vengeful, semi-decayed and very much in the form of *Sea-Draugr* as one of the Cove's boss monsters. Even their murderer cannot help but note that they are "poor devils, chained and drowning, for eternity..." and that they "are cursed to float forever, deep in the swirling blackness, far beyond the light's reach."

Again, we have an example of *Sea-Draugr* who represent loss, guilt and an ability to escape the past. Given the utter immorality of the ancestor, it falls onto the player to either drive them back below the water or free them from their curse once and for all. They reflect the pessimism and dark humour that underpins the game – one attack they can inflict on the adventurers is 'Drink with the Dead' where one undead sailor swigs grog while driving – but also provide an excellent example of modern day *Sea-Draugr*, proxies for guilt and inescapable memory in equal measure. The Cove itself is an ideal stage for this to play out on; its classical-style ruins hint at a bleak past, barely remembered, while obstacles come in the form of shipwrecks, and boons in the form of ship figureheads, lucky only in the sense that they didn't sink down with the rest of their ships. Once again, the seashore is portrayed as a place where death, memorials to death and tragedy are all washed up. It also demonstrates how the *Sea-Draugr* has continued its progress from Scandinavian myth into new regions of popular culture.

Finally, there must be a mention of Lucio Fulci's *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (1979). While the zombies in this film are neither sentient nor driven by any other purpose other than to devour the living, they do nonetheless reflect the *Sea-Draugr* in two significant ways. Firstly, there is the infamous shark scene, where an underwater zombie fights a shark for the right to devour a nubile topless scuba diver. While sleazy and absurd in equal measure, it does explore one aspect of the *Sea-Draugr* myth that is otherwise overlooked; how these undead sea dwellers interact with their home environment. While the sagas and Norwegian folklore have *Sea-Draugr* and *Draugs* emerging from the sea, they do not ever address what role these creatures play in those deep waters. In that sense, while the *Sea-Draugr* are examples of maritime horror, in that sense alone they seem cut off or isolated even from the sea itself, though Norwegian *Draug* folklore does at least describe some of them having heads made out of seaweed (Jordahl, p.10) or adopting the form of a malig-



nant seal (Jordahl, p.12). For *Sea-Draugr*, the sea is something to come from and to return to, but not to actually be a part of.

There is also a maritime subtext. The film's first act sees an apparently abandoned ship drift into New York, which brings with it a zombie, who attack and infects a 'Patient Zero' who then spreads it throughout the city while the protagonists search for its origins on a remote island. The zombie itself, played by a bald, bulky actor, resembles a particularly bloated *Draugr*. When shot, it falls overboard, echoing the disposal of some *Draugr* in Icelandic sagas. The final act, meanwhile, inverts the *Sea-Draugr* archetype altogether. The last two survivors find themselves trapped on another ship, their former-ally-turned-zombie trying to break out and eat them. They are adrift and unable to return home; New York has been overrun by the undead, and so in a curious way these survivors have become a kind of living *Sea-Draugr*, adrift from their previous lives and unable to find closure.

Finally, *Zombie Flesh Eaters* also addresses issues of guilt and regret. The island's resident doctor is a tortured man, who is forced to keep killing, or re-killing, all the corpses that reanimate. This blatant metaphor for trying and failing to evade grief is later followed by one of the film's set-pieces, where the rotten corpses of long-dead conquistadors emerge from their graves and attack the protagonists. Here the horrors of Empire and imperial conquest literally come back to haunt the (American) characters, the sea-borne colonisation of the Americas, with all its attendant cruelties and violence, refusing to be forgotten.

### Modern *Sea-Draugr* in function, not form

*Sea-Draugr* also appear in another form. This is an altogether more subtle definition as many of the examples in this section are not walking corpses, or even (un)dead in some cases. However, what they all share in common is that they serve the same purpose as a *Sea-Draugr* – to represent guilt, loss and regret, to do so in a fashion that haunts the subject and in a fashion that is, in one way or another, unnerving. These are *Sea-Draugr* taken to their logical conclusion, where all vestiges of the original myth are shed, leaving behind only those universal themes and motifs at its heart.

This allows for a far greater diversity of realisation than the other type of modern *Sea-Draugr*. One example of this is James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997), not in itself a ghost story until its very last scene where the now-ancient survivor of that disaster, Rose, is reunited with her true love, Jack, and all the other passengers who died on that fateful night in 1912. Whether this is a dream or Rose's death and subsequent ascent into the afterlife is left to the audience to decide, but it is significant to note that this vision of the afterlife is still contained within the *Titanic* itself. Neither Rose, nor Jack, nor the other passengers seem able to escape or transcend the disaster. While this vision of the afterlife is certainly a happy one, where the noxious class divisions and conflicts on-board before the disaster are set aside, and a divine

light seems to stream in through the skylights, all on-board are still caught in a sort of faintly melancholy, bittersweet stasis – albeit one that is implied to be heavenly. This discordance is made explicit in the original script for the film, which concludes with the following direction:

THE WRECK OF TITANIC looms like a ghost out of the dark. It is lit by a kind of moonlight, a light of the mind... WE GO INSIDE, and the echoing sound of distant waltz music is heard. The rust fades away from the walls of the dark corridor and it is transformed... WE EMERGE onto the grand staircase, lit by glowing chandeliers.... At the bottom a man stands with his back to us... he turns and it is Jack. Smiling he holds his hand out towards us. IN A SIDE ANGLE Rose goes into his arms, a girl of 17. The passengers, officers and crew of the RMS Titanic smile and applaud in the utter silence of the abyss. (Cameron 1996)

While the ending features a kind of living death, or afterlife, that is quite the opposite from the gloomy vision of the traditional *Sea-Draugr*, it does not retreat from the disaster of the *Titanic*, which continues to haunt the popular imagination, nor the horror of hundreds of lives lost at sea. The inhabitants of the *Titanic* are trapped there in death as they were in the last moments of life. Once the love story and melodrama of the film is stripped away, it quite deliberately directs us to the terrible reality of death at sea, injustice, and of unresolved tragedy.

The *Titanic*, of course, continues to loom in the public conscience as various film and television adaptations demonstrate. Another example of its conflation with *Sea-Draugr* is in *Ghostbusters II* (1989), where the ship itself re-floats and docks in its intended New York, disgorging sinister streams of ghostly passengers from its rusted hulk. Here the *Titanic* itself becomes a *Sea-Draugr* of sorts; a traumatic memory that continues to re-surface, the humorous undertone of the scene undermined by its menace and the on-going cultural response to its tragedy.

Two other notable examples of this archetype demonstrate its versatility. The 1972 *Doctor Who* serial, *The Sea Devils*, by Malcolm Hulke, does not, of course feature *Sea-Draugr*, but it does feature sinister sea creatures who emerge from the depths in a famous scene that echoes the rising dead from other examples in this paper. The story itself is a sequel of sorts to Hulke's *The Silurians* (1970), and shares its themes of clashes between species – an ancient civilisation confronting with the one that has replaced it and the essential tragedy of this conflict. What gives it relevance in this case is the maritime nature of the story – the *Sea Devils* are aquatic relatives of their Silurian cousins and their intention to awaken the other sleeping colonies of their kind and re-conquer the world. The essential conflict of the story is summarised in the fifth episode by the leader of the creatures: "This is our planet. My people ruled the Earth when man was only an ape." The Doctor attempts a treaty between humanity and the *Sea Devils*, but this fails and,

as in *The Silurians*, (1970) the conflict ends in the destruction of the ancients by humanity.

Here, the essential *Sea-Draugr* theme is again played out. That is, tragedy, conflict, horror, an uncertain resolution – in that it is stated that there are other Sea Devils still in stasis – and a lingering sense of regret. The Sea Devils, as former rulers of the world, haunt humanity in the fashion of vengeful spirits or undead monsters. They could easily be substituted with *Sea-Draugr* and the story would require little change.

The other example is the 2009 film, *Triangle*. Here, a woman, Jess, is pursued through a ghost ship by a shadowy killer who butchers her friends. The twist is later revealed; the protagonist is caught in a perpetual time loop where the same events, or variations thereof, continue to repeat themselves. She discovers that she is in fact the killer, from a previous cycle, and so sets about trying to escape from it, up to and including having another version of herself killed. Further complicating matters is the fact that the protagonist also realises, by seeing another version of herself abusing her son, that she is in fact more monstrous than she has realised. She kills the version of herself who has been cruel to her son, before commencing on yet another loop. It is not clear whether she is able to break the cycle, as she continues to find evidence of many previous loops, but she continues, regardless.

Where is the *Sea-Draugr* here, however? It is, in fact, Jess herself. Her constant repetition of prior events and traumas represents the burden of a guilty conscience, her acts of self-murder subliminal gestures of self-loathing and disassociation from the reality of the scenario. In that sense, Jess is in fact a unique form of *Sea-Draugr*, trapped in a state between life and death – her reality subverted by the sea and her actions driven by guilt, remorse and shame. Like the *Sea-Draugr*, she is both alive and dead, albeit in a fashion quite different from more ‘typical’ examples, and like them, there is no certain resolution for her. Here the *Sea-Draugr* reaches its next destination, where the line between unliving aquatic monster and human is blurred. Anyone can become a *Sea-Draugr*, although, as *Triangle* suggests, perhaps that was not as great a change as we may have first imagined.

### The *Sea-Draugr* in the news

Where will the *Sea-Draugr* go next? It has, in fact, already colonised the great longform narrative of our times – namely news media. An example of this is the fate that befell German sailor Manfred Fritz Bajorat. In February 2016, his mummified remains were found on his half-sunken yacht off the coast of the Philippines (Sample 2016). Inside, witnesses saw a ghastly sight – Bajorat, dead, yet mummified in the dry air of the boat’s interior. His features, facial and head hair and even his facial features and fingerprints, while all showing the signs of desiccation, were nonetheless remarkably preserved. As the eerie photography of the dead man demonstrates, the scene was strangely poignant, in that the dead sailor seemed to be sleeping,

horrific, in that the condition of the man’s remains were still dreadful to behold, and haunting in that he had died alone, having lost his ex-wife several years before.

The coverage of the death consistently featured the shot of his corpse, regardless of whether it was a ‘quality’ or ‘popular’ news outlet. Most used the word ‘mummy’ to describe the remains, though this seems inappropriate, given where the man died and where his remains were found. Could Bajorat be seen as a kind of real life *Sea-Draugr*? He was of course no walking corpse, but the melancholy and macabre circumstances echo the unquiet dead of the Icelandic sagas, who will not be ignored or simply forgotten.

Another recent, and notorious example was the tragic death by drowning of the three-year-old Syrian refugee, Aylan Kurdi. The iconic image of his small body gently being picked up off a Turkish shore by a policeman, who seems to cradle him in his hands, made an immediate impact on the on-going debate regarding migration in the wake of the Syrian war (Homans 2015). Kurdi’s death caused a reappraisal of public attitudes across the world (BBC 2015) with many, but not all, UK media outlets softening their previous anti-refugee rhetoric (Greenslade 2015). In terms of symbolic impact, Kurdi certainly fulfilled the function of a *Sea-Draugr* in the sense that he invoked conflicted feelings of guilt, bereavement, horror and a pricking of the conscience, but he also became a symbol of fear, as the cartoon by *Charlie Hebdo* which implied that he could have become a rapist or criminal if he had made it to Europe demonstrates (Meade 2015). Certainly, his death has not changed much in the way of the refugees’ plight – since his death, more than 300 children have subsequently drowned when their boats capsized, and with little of the same coverage (Stanton 2016), while anti-refugee rhetoric has continued to harden (Conolly 2016). Yet the image of Kurdi’s body nonetheless has an undeniable poignancy – it is an accusation and a challenge that threatens our preconceptions and sense of certainty. In that sense, of course, this tragedy has much in common with *Sea-Draugr* narratives.

Similar dynamics lay behind other images of washed up human bodies. Images of the thousands of corpses washed up in the wake of the 2011 Japanese tsunami share the same combination of pathos, horror and a sense of an accusation being made to the viewer (Guttenfelder 2011). The wreckage of destroyed villages and towns, and beached ships and boats, have similar significance. As Caple and Bednarek have argued, (2016, pp.443–444) photojournalism covering the disaster has an element of artifice involved; images that fit into existing preconceptions and enable ‘superlativeness’ in terms of news writing and visual aesthetics are the ones that are featured, as demonstrated, for example, by a series of photographs of a ‘ghost ship’, shaken free of its moorings by the Tsunami and left to float aimlessly. (Rosen 2012) In this sense, it is safe to say that these images were chosen because they fit into existing narratives, including that of the *Sea-Draugr*.

## Conclusion

In this sense, the *Sea-Draugr* has become a widespread, even international archetype as a result of widespread dissemination and its compelling nature. It would seem a guilty conscience is a fertile place for the imagination and the *Sea-Draugr* also allows us to express a strange, often adversarial relationship with the sea, as well as our own tragedies and sense of civic, social and personal responsibility.

Yet the main strength of the *Sea-Draugr* is this – it is able to travel and spread into a broader public consciousness, though not necessarily as obviously as might be expected. The archetype is also able to evolve and develop over time, to undertake shifts and alterations in tone. Like the Ancient Mariner's tale, it would seem that the *Sea-Draugr* has become a story we must continue to re-tell.

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