

= Nuckelavee =

The nuckelavee (pronunciation : / nʔklʔʔʔviʔ /) or nuckalavee is a horse @-@ like demon from Orcadian mythology that combines equine and human elements . It has its origins in Norse mythology , and is the most horrible of all the demons of the Scottish islands . The nuck component of its name may be cognate with Nick in Old Nick , a name for the Christian Devil . The nuckelavee 's breath was thought to wilt crops and sicken livestock , and the creature was held responsible for droughts and epidemics on land despite its being predominantly a sea @-@ dweller .

A graphic description of the nuckelavee as it appears on land was given by an islander who claimed to have had a confrontation with it , but accounts describing the details of the creature 's appearance are inconsistent . In common with many other sea monsters it is unable to tolerate fresh water , therefore those it is pursuing have only to cross a river or stream to be rid of it . The nuckelavee is kept in confinement during the summer months by the Mither o ' the Sea , an ancient Orcadian spirit , and the only one able to control it .

Orcadian folklore had a strong Scandinavian influence , and it may be that the nuckelavee is a composite of a water horse from Celtic mythology and a creature imported by the Norsemen . As with similar malevolent entities such as the kelpie , it possibly offered an explanation for incidents that islanders in ancient times could not otherwise understand .

= = Etymology = =

The late 19th century saw an upsurge of interest in transcribing folklore , but the recorders used inconsistent spelling and frequently anglicised words , thus the same entity could be given different names . The term nuckelavee derives from Orcadian knoggelvi , and according to Orkney resident and 19th @-@ century folklorist Walter Traill Dennison means " Devil of the Sea " . The same demon is called a mukkelevi in Shetland , where it was considered a nasty sea trow or sea devil . Samuel Hibbert , an antiquarian of the early nineteenth century , considered the component nuck of the nuckelavee 's name to be cognate with both the Nick in Old Nick , a name sometimes given to the Devil of Christian belief , and with the Latin necare , to kill .

= = Folk beliefs = =

= = = Description and common attributes = = =

Stories of mythical Orcadian demons are recorded in the 16th @-@ century Latin manuscripts of Jo Ben , who may have been referring to the nuckelavee in his description of the Orkney island of Stronsay . Dennison transcribed much of the information available about traditional tales told on Orkney , but to an extent romanticised and systematically altered certain elements of the stories in the process of transforming them into prose .

The nuckelavee is a mythical sea creature that appears as a horse @-@ like demon when it ventures onto land . Writer and folklorist Ernest Marwick considered it very similar to the Norwegian nøkk , the nuggle of the Shetlands and the kelpie . A unique and solitary creature possessing extensive evil powers , its malevolent behaviour can influence events throughout the islands . Islanders were terrified of the creature and would not speak its name without immediately saying a prayer . It was often found in the vicinity of a beach , but would never come ashore if it was raining .

No tales describe what form the nuckelavee takes when in the sea , but its appearance on land has been recounted in graphic detail . An islander , Tammass , claimed to have survived a confrontation with the beast and , after much cajoling from Dennison , reluctantly gave his description of the monster , the only known first @-@ hand account . According to Tammass , the nuckelavee has a man 's torso attached to a horse 's back as if it were a rider . The male torso has no legs , but its arms can reach the ground from its position on top of the equine body , the legs of which have fin like appendages . The torso has a large head ? possibly as much as 3 feet (90 centimetres) in

diameter ? that rolls back and forth . The monster described by Tammas has two heads ; the equine head has an enormous gaping mouth that exudes a smelly toxic vapour , and a single giant eye like a burning red flame . A particularly gruesome detail is that the nuckelavee has no skin ; black blood courses through yellow veins , and the pale sinews and powerful muscles are visible as a pulsating mass . Other reports state that the creature resembles a centaur ; narratives are inconsistent in the finer details of the demon 's description however . Traill Dennison only describes a man 's head with a " mouth projected like that of a pig " . Marwick also only mentions one head with a single red eye , and he borrows some of Tammas 's characterisation by recording the creature 's mouth as " like a whale 's " .

The nuckelavee 's breath was thought to wilt crops and sicken livestock , and it was considered responsible for epidemics and drought . Seaweed burning to create what was known at the time as kelp began on Stronsay in 1722 . The product ? soda ash ? was an alkali mainly used to treat acidic soil , although as time went on its commercial importance in soap and glass manufacture increased . The pungent smoke emitted during the process was believed to enrage the nuckelavee , resulting in a wild rampage of plague , the deaths of cattle and the destruction of crops . The nuckelavee was said to have infected horses on Stronsay with the deadly disease known as mortasheen , to demonstrate its fury and exact its revenge against the islanders for burning seaweed ; the infection subsequently spread to all the other islands involved in the industry . The creature was also blamed for prolonged periods of abnormally low rainfall , leading to water shortages and poor harvests .

= = Confinement = =

The nuckelavee is the most malevolent of the demons in and around the Scottish islands , without any redeeming characteristics . The only entity able to control it is the Mither o ' the Sea , an ancient spirit in Orcadian mythology who keeps the nuckelavee confined during the summer months . In common with other mythical sea monsters , with the possible exception of kelpies and the nuggle of Shetland , it is unable to wade through fresh flowing water , therefore those it is chasing have only to cross a stream to be rid of it . Tammas managed to escape from the nuckelavee after he inadvertently splashed it with water from the loch he was alongside ; this briefly distracted the monster , allowing Tammas to run over to a nearby channel of fresh water and jump to safety on the opposite bank .

= = Origins = =

Malevolent creatures possibly served to provide explanations for incidents that islanders from bygone times were otherwise unable to account for ; many ancient myths were based upon the natural elements of the turbulent and ever changing sea around Orkney . Established Orcadian tales were strongly influenced by Scandinavian mythology with a blending of traditional Celtic stories , so the nuckelavee may have its roots in a mythical creature imported by the Norsemen fused with a traditional Celtic water horse .