

Brainstorm

The Jersey Devil

The Number of the beast

There are many stories surrounding the origin of the Jersey Devil – a gypsy curse, the doomed offspring of a traitorous affair, a mistreated clergyman's spiritual revenge. The most common legend is that the creature is the unlucky 13th child of Mother Leeds, a woman who some suspected of witchcraft. During this unwanted pregnancy, she cursed the unborn child saying, "Let it be a devil!" On a stormy night in 1735, Mother Leeds, assisted by old midwives, gave birth to the unfortunate child. Although born normal, once handed to the mother, the baby quickly transformed into a horrible beast. The creature made meals of the entire Leeds clan and the midwives. It then crashed through the roof with a shrill howl and escaped into the woods and swamps of the Pine Barrens.

The Devil's Reign

The birthplace of the Jersey Devil is believed to be an area known as Leeds Point in eastern Atlantic County. But the creature really likes to travel, having been sighted everywhere from Cape May County to the New York border. Numerous sightings in 1909 were clustered near Philadelphia in Gloucester, Camden and Burlington counties. The creature has been described in many ways, ranging in height from 20 feet to 18 inches. It may have the head of a dog, horse, cow or goat, the body of a scaly kangaroo or serpent, the legs of a pig or goat, huge bat-like wings and horns or antlers. It has the ability to run, swim and fly great distances very quickly and silently. It is also said to breathe fire, although it is mostly said to have breath that is hot and foul enough to kill fish and small game.



Sympathy for the Devil

Some sightings would suggest the Jersey Devil leads a rather active social life in the realm of the supernatural. It has been seen cavorting with a beauti-

ful, glowing, golden-haired maiden, frolicking with mermaids in the ocean surf, and strolling with the headless ghost of a pirate. But mostly it is reported

to be alone. It has been blamed for many misfortunes: slaughtered livestock, forest fires, home and crop demolition. It has been hunted, exorcised, shot, burned

and electrocuted. But like most legends it defies destruction and lives on to roam the dense dark forests, murky marshes and our fertile imaginations.