



Oct. 25, 2017

It's Halloween, and, like me, many of you may idly have asked yourselves why witches in folklore and fairy tales never relied on Irish wolfhounds as familiars.

They are, after all, formidable individuals. Clever, quick and persuasive. Charming as Beelzebub himself when there's food in the bargain. And we Irish wolfhound enthusiasts are keenly aware that our magnificent hounds just don't get the lavish recognition they naturally deserve. They ought to be on billboards, in the movies and—say, why is it that no wolfhound has his own television series? Come Halloween and it's all about bats, ravens and black cats. Has a witch never at least *tried* a wolfhound helper?

(Note: By “witch,” I mean the fairy tale and folklore version, not contemporary worshippers of the earth religions. In truth, I know some who *do* have Irish wolfhounds and love the deep magic they find in their remarkable, soulful companions.)

Like me, though, you probably thought the question through a littttle more thoroughly, smacked yourself on the forehead and realized there are just a few drawbacks to using a wolfhound as a familiar. To name a few flies in the ointment:

### **Aerodynamics**

Witches are often portrayed weaving through the night sky astride enchanted brooms with their black cat nimbly perched on back. Cats, as you know, are light and sleek. Wolfhounds, not so light and sleek. It'd take a powerful lot of enchantment to get one airborne. Or maybe an aircraft carrier catapult.

Then there's the question of drag. Big dog, big drag. A witch would

have to leave a *long* time before midnight to get anywhere towing a dog the size of a pony. She'd miss a lot of witch meetings that way. Plus there's the "nimble" issue. Most wolfhounds aren't. More time lost plucking hounds out of treetops and explaining to the villagers why a 160-pound dog plunged through their thatch roof in the middle of the night. You could get a reputation.

### **‘Fetch Me That Eye of Newt’**

Wolfhound owners see several obvious red flags with that statement. Familiars assist with spells. In the heat of brewing up spells, a witch needs more than one set of hands. But wolfhounds aren't accomplished fetchers. They *are* keen filchers. I've personally never tasted eye of newt, but I'm guessing if you point some out to a wolfhound, none of it would make it into the cauldron.

### **Accurasy, Accurasy, Accurasy**

We all know from watching Harry Potter that potion making is iffy business. A pinch of this and a pinch of that and you've got yourself a pair of ears like a mule. Which may not have been your intention. A witch's familiar is sometimes her muse, guiding her through the minefield of complicated spells. Ask a wolfhound for herbal insights and he might....bring you his leash. Or slap on the cabinet where the treats are. He has his own priorities. Falling through an interdimensional vortex you inadvertently created? Hope you have cheese if you expect *his* help getting out. Have you considered brewing a nice cup of tea, instead?

### **The Eyes and Ears**

Fairytale witches relied on familiars for information. They might need to know what the local witch hunters were up to. Maybe they needed dirt on the neighbors. Black cats and crows are handy spies. Wolfhounds can't creep worth a darn. They can't hide in trees, at

least not for long. In their own homes, it's true, they can sneak a pot roast right out from under you, but they stand out tip-toeing across the village green.

Plus, their idea of critical information may vary from yours. They can ferret out where the neighbors store their cheese. They can lead you swiftly to the meat smokehouse. If there's a pie in a window anywhere in the hamlet, they're onto it. But unless you're planning on opening an enchanted deli, look for other informants.

### **Prince Rupert and His Poodle**

Surprisingly, I did come across a purported witch who had a dog as a familiar, Prince Rupert of the Rhine, a Royalist general during the English Civil War. A Cavalier and something of a dandy, he rode into battle with his dog, Boye, a ferocious war poodle.

Rupert apparently had the devil's own luck, surviving scores of nasty skirmishes. Parliamentarian forces feared Rupert, and whispers began to spread that Rupert was a witch. They said Boye snatched bullets out of the air with his teeth before they could strike his master.

The devil poodle was finally struck down in battle on Marston Moor, killed by a silver bullet.