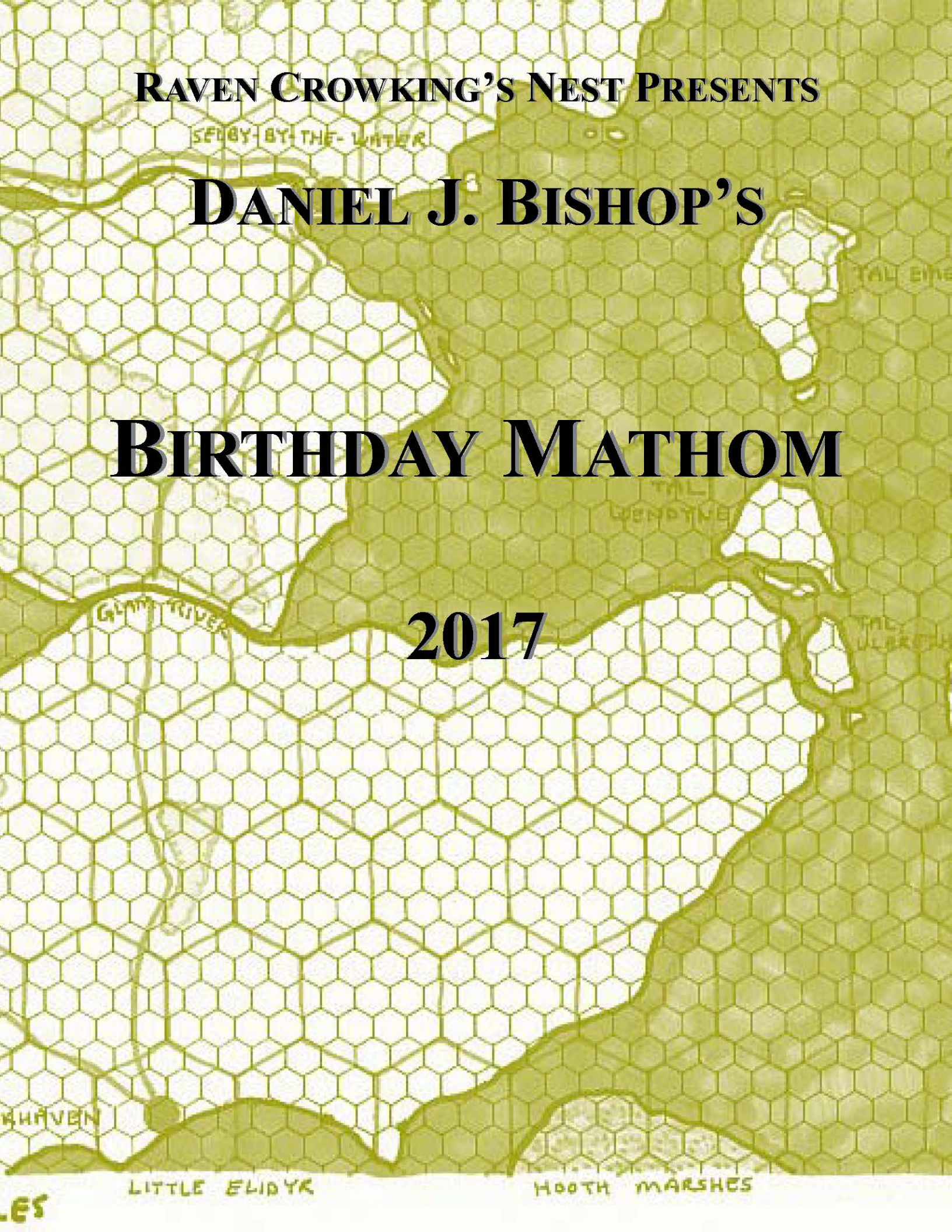




RAVEN CROWKING'S NEST PRESENTS

DANIEL J. BISHOP'S

BIRTHDAY MATHOM

2017

Faerie Encounters

By

Daniel J. Bishop

This material first appeared in *Dragon Roots Magazine*, issue #3. At that time, the material was written for 3rd Edition Dungeons & Dragons. All material has been reworked for *Dungeon Crawl Classics*.

The fey include some of the most interesting creatures in role-playing games, but also some of the most under-used. It is easy to stage an encounter with wolves or an ogre. It is far harder to make a workable encounter with pixies. For many judges, using faeries as opponents reduces the seriousness of the game. As a result, satisfying faerie encounters are hard to come by, even in published adventures by veteran designers.

This article will help you use existing game material to create and role-play interesting, exciting, and – most importantly – satisfying faerie encounters.

The d20 System Reference Document describes fey as “a creature with supernatural abilities and connections to nature or to some other force or place” and notes that “Fey are usually human-shaped” and “eat, sleep, and breathe.” In folklore, faeries are much more.

Game system designers attempt to quantify as much as possible. This is extremely important, because the more you can quantify, the more you can use within the game. Judges need to go beyond the material presented in the rulebooks to use the fey effectively. The rulebooks represent what is *known*. Faeries represent the *unknown*, the Other. The judge should modify both description and game statistics to make each faerie encountered into exactly what she wishes it to be.

Whereas angels represent lofty, idealized forces, and demons magnify the worst facets of human nature, faeries represent those things people encounter most often – fire, wind, water, apple trees, the hearth, the barn, haystacks and millwheels. They also represent borders, and as such the line between the fey and the dead is very thin in faerie mythology. Faeries are related to the dead, fallen angels, old gods, and elementals.

As a result, a “faerie encounter” may include encounters with many different creature types, including the diminished gods of ancient religions.

You might also consider giving important faeries the power to manifest and return after being reduced to 0 hp, as can ghosts. Like ghosts, fey are not always there when you look for them. However, when the conditions are right, they appear. Many others seem to return, even if slain. They, or other fey very like them, keep coming back.

Basic Considerations

The first step toward designing any faerie encounter is determining what the creature represents. The most common faeries may represent a natural phenomenon. This can be anything from rain, a season, a time of day, a particular plant or animal, a forest, a region, aging, etc. Other faeries may represent domestic tasks or human activity. There may be faeries that represent sweeping, spinning thread, blacksmithing, and so on. Even where faeries represent diminished deities, they are deities of natural forces or human activity.

In order to make these encounters effective, we need to seed clues about their true natures. Because we want to maintain the ambiguous nature of the fey, we don't want to say that our encounter is, for example, with a "Birch Faerie," but we want the players to be able to figure it out.

By making a list of the qualities associated with birch trees, we can begin to describe our faerie. Birch trees have peeling white bark, so our faerie will have white skin. She will be old, allowing us to describe the skin as parchment-thin and peeling. Let us assume as well that our story takes place in autumn, so that we can give her thin strands of yellow hair, to represent the trees' fallen leaves.

Knowing a faerie's true name gives one power over it, so faeries are seldom willing to part with anything even close. Most fey rely on nicknames that reflect their nature. The malevolent brownie, Yallery Brown, for example, was named for the color of his hair. Titania's attendants in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are named after their associated plants. Mother Goose offers a wealth of faerie names to be plucked from old nursery rhymes. We will call our birch tree faerie the White Lady, because it ties in well with her appearance without completely giving her true nature away.

When designing faerie encounters, you cannot place too much emphasis on the importance of setting. Fey are most often found in borderlands, including beaches, rivers, and the edges between forests and fields. They are also associated with temporal borderlands: noon, midnight, twilight, and dawn, solstices, equinoxes, and the turn of the year. These areas form borders between day and night, calendar days, seasons, and years.

If there is no convenient border near where you want to stage your faerie encounter, you may consider placing it near an ancient ruin. Faeries are attracted to areas where people once lived, the longer ago the better. If the area contains a ruined archway, so much the better. Stone dolmens – two longstones surmounted by a capstone – both provide gates (and hence imply borders) and links to ancient people. In a forest, two old trees leaning against each other might be a sign of faerie habitation.

Fey are not only located at border areas, they are creatures of the borders themselves. Dryads, for example, have the characteristics of both plants and animals. Other fey symbolize the borders between man and animal, and between what is real and what is illusion.

A faerie who is also a fox illustrates this perfectly. Although the fey may take a man-like shape, he is likely to be small, with delicate hands, a red coat, and whiskers. By giving him a bushy tail (often hidden, but sometimes seen), we are able to give our players the impression that he is something between human and beast. Hopefully, they will not mistake him for a lycanthrope.

Humanoid fey are associated with earth tones, wood, moss, and stone; or else with the gaudy finery from days gone by. Faerie animals are most often white or red, or some combination of the two. Faerie hounds, for example, are most often white with red ears. Other faerie animals might be black, or even green.

Role-Playing Faeries

Faeries are *not* human. They seem to be very interested in human behavior. They often recreate, or pantomime, human activities, but it is unclear how often they understand them. Sometimes, helpful fey are doing work merely because they have observed mortals performing the same task. Their lack of understanding, though, can sometimes lead to tragic consequences.

It is often useful to prepare some dialogue for fey characters ahead of time. Fey are prone to use archaic words, and speak or sing in doggerel verse. The Internet is a handy source for discovering archaic terms, and there are several websites that translate terms from Germanic, Old English, and similar languages. These can be used to name fey, or to provide terms with which to pepper faerie speech. Again, both Mother Goose and William Shakespeare are excellent sources to cannibalize for fey dialogue.

Because players are likely to be familiar with the classic fairy tales, it is recommended that you stay away from directly extrapolating *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Aladdin*.

(Note that, in some cases, you may intentionally want to mirror a known fairy tale, as with the ***Faerie Tales From Unlit Shores*** series published by **Purple Duck Games**).

The series of “Colored” Fairy Books (i.e., *The Red Fairy Book*, *The Blue Fairy Book*, etc.), edited by Andrew Lang, contains volumes of stories that most players will not be familiar with. Some of these contain speeches, encounters, and settings that can be easily adapted to ***Dungeon Crawl Classics***. Others, of course, require more work.

Treated well, faeries are liable to be helpful in return, or to leave gifts. Often faerie gifts have some stipulation, and turn to valueless substances (such as dry leaves) if the stipulations are not met. These are often simple, such as not counting the money until you get home. Faerie tricks are often the flip side of faerie gifts. If a character behaves in a certain way, he is rewarded. If he behaves in another way, he pays a forfeit. In some cases, this behavior might be as simple as succeeding in a skill check (although role-playing is a superior option). In other cases, extraordinary measures might be required to placate a faerie that has suffered insult.

It should be noted that faerie tricks are often pointed, and may even be intended to be helpful. The rude sister whose mouth vomits forth snakes and toads whenever she speaks may learn to be more polite. The greedy innkeeper who is led on a wild goose chase all night after a pot of silver, only to find it contains nothing more than reflected moonlight, might learn to value money a little less...or at least think before he acts.

Oddly enough, faeries are themselves often easily tricked. Despite their love of such activities, many fey seem to have difficulty understanding that mortals may hide their motives. Indeed, there is evidence in some folk tales that faeries find mortals as uncanny and hard to fathom as mortals find them.

Flavor Encounters

There are two types of encounters to consider. One is the flavor encounter, which exists simply to remind the players that certain creatures exist within the campaign area. The other is the encounter proper. Good judging includes balancing both.

For example, while the player characters are traveling through a forest, the judge might describe to them the birds, chipmunks, and other small animals they see, allow them to find boar tracks, and let them come across the remains of a deer killed by wolves. These are all flavor encounters. However, they provide important information, such as the presence of creatures that might be encountered later. They also allow the judge to mention a raven later without the players automatically knowing it is important.

Faeries may also be encountered as flavor encounters. Helpful faeries may mend a buckle while the characters sleep. Other fey may tangle their horses' manes, or put thorns in their bedrolls.

Usually, even these types of encounters require some action on the PCs' part – they travel to an area jealously guarded by the fey, they forget to brush down their mounts when they make camp, or they come to the aid of an elderly woman.

As with any creature type, it is useful to foreshadow a larger faerie encounter with signs that the fey are active in the area. Faerie rings, old standing stones, and treeless circular hills are all common signs of faerie habitation. These are not the only things associated with the fey. Faeries favor abandoned dwellings fallen into ruin, wells, and stands of thorn trees.

Consider the number of fairy tales in our world. How many more stories there must be in a world where they fey are not only known to exist, but can be demonstrably proven to do so. Wandering bards might know songs telling of fey encounters. The characters might hear a storyteller in the village square. You do not need to create the details of these stories. It is generally enough to have a title (*Queen Ygrainne and the Pixies*, for example) and a rough idea what actual story it most closely resembles (“It seems to be a version of *The Three Little Pigs*,

except the pixies want to get in, not keep the Queen out"). These kinds of details can bring a world to life.

The three standard encounters characters are likely to have with fey are with Faerie Guardians, Faerie Guides, and Malevolent Fey.

Faerie Guardians

In story terms, Faerie Guardians are creatures which are designed as an obstacle, but which are not actively antagonistic to the player characters. Faerie Guardians guard both magic items and locations. In some cases, what they guard might be both, such as a magical fountain or a tree that bears healing fruit. Locations are often sacred sites, usually with magical properties. For example, a water faerie may guard a spring that casts healing spells on those who drink from it. So long as the guardian remains in contact with the spring, she regenerates.

Being creatures of borders, the other places that Faerie Guardians are associated with are bridges. Any place that offers clear passage from one significant location to another – a mountain pass, a clear channel into a reef-ringed bay, or even a long tunnel from one dungeon complex to another – may become the haunt of a Faerie Guardian.

There is always a trick to defeating these creatures, but unless you know it the task can seem insurmountable. In order to be effective encounters, Faerie Guardians must generally be stronger than the characters they face. The characters must have a way to know that the Faerie Guardian represents a strong challenge. The player characters also need a reason to access whatever it is that the Faerie Guardian guards.

Imagine that we wanted to create a fey-based adventure. Going back to our example of the birch tree faerie we dubbed the White Lady, we decide to make her a Faerie Guardian. Because she is associated with trees, we will use a dryad as her base creature, converting the base statistics from 1st or 3rd Edition D&D, depending upon what you have most easily available.

Doing an Internet search on the name "White Lady" brings up an association with ghosts and banshees. In old stories, trees often bear ill will toward humans. Faeries are often associated with the dead. Taken together, these things lead us to decide that local lore tells of the White Lady of the Birches, who haunts the road at night. If she touches you, you die. In some stories, her victims haunt the road with her.

Giving some vampire characteristics to our dryad allows us to create a reasonably good approximation of the creature we are describing. We don't expect her to drain blood or be repelled by garlic, but we can give her some special abilities from the ghost in the ***Dungeon Crawl Classics*** core rulebook, and make her repelled by cold iron.

We still have not decided exactly what the White Lady is guarding.

Faerie Guides

In order to give the player characters a chance to learn about our new creations, we can employ a Faerie Guide. A Faerie Guide is any fey character whose purpose is to give information, help, or guidance within an adventure. Gaining help from Faerie Guides should require both role-playing and skill checks. It is generally true that Faerie Guides seek to help only good-natured individuals with useful domestic skills. Indeed, they often have the means to punish those who fail to meet the challenge they represent.

You can have the Faerie Guide reward some particular skill from a PC's occupation. If not, you can create a task that can be performed untrained. Tasks might include grooming, sharing food, helping to compose (or remember) a tune, or anything else that the judge desires.

The statistics for a Faerie Guardian are not particularly important. The important thing for the judge to devise is the information that the Faerie Guide can impart, and what the characters must do to get it. If the player characters get into a fight with a Faerie Guide, the creature should concentrate on escaping. If the creature escapes or is killed, the loss of information should prove penalty enough.

For our example, we could use the fox-faerie, and say that he is herding geese. Gooseherds often appear in fairy tales, so this seems appropriate. Naturally, the geese are afraid of him. If the characters round up the geese for him, he will give them information for their trouble. If they capture only some of the geese, they only get some of the information. If they fail completely, or refuse to help, they get nothing.

Malevolent Fey

Setting up extended encounters with Malevolent Fey is probably the most challenging.

Malevolent Fey may first seem to be helpful. Many fairy tales include elements of *Rumplestiltskin*, wherein a faerie makes a bargain with someone in need. In *Rumplestiltskin*, of course, the titular fey offers to spin straw into gold in exchange for the victim's first-born child.

Many Malevolent Fey only become actively malevolent when insulted in some way. Unfortunately, these creatures are easy to insult. In most cases, they do not care if their victims insulted them intentionally or not.

Folk beliefs and local lore offer many tips for dealing with malevolent faeries. For simple encounters, simply avoiding an activity (such as looking at the faerie, or speaking to it) or performing a simple, non-magical ward (turning one's coat inside-out, or carrying a cold iron holy symbol) can bring one through the encounter safely. Since most locals are forced to deal with the malevolent fey in their area, the necessary steps can be gained through a few role-playing encounters.

Malevolent Fey can be crafted as a challenging encounter for a single adventure, or they can be created to act throughout a campaign. As with all good villains, Malevolent Fey require a background story. For our example, we will use a diminished hunting god, loosely based off Herne. He looks like tall, shaggy, dark-skinned human sporting antlers, with a white mantle and red hair. We will call him simply the Stagman. He travels upon a white horse, and his hounds are white with red ears.

As a back-story, we can say that the Stagman once had a herd of milky white cattle. With the herd he kept a great Red Bull. Long ago, a king decided that he wanted the Red Bull, but nothing would make the Stagman part with it. The king hired a group of heroes to steal the bull. The bull bred with the king's stock, and the effects of that greatsire are still felt today. That is why the cattle in the area are so hardy and their milk so sweet. The Stagman has haunted the region ever since, occasionally working plots against the kingdom.

Pulling this all together, we have the basis for a scenario.

When the Red Bull died, it was buried with great ceremony. Trees were planted at its grave. These trees grew into a stand of birch, which are now haunted by the White Lady. Were the characters to learn where the bull was buried, and get past the guardian, they could recover the Red Bull's skull and return it to the Stagman. What reward this would gain them is up to the Game Master, but at the least it would stop the Stagman's current plot. All of this is information they could gain from a certain clever gooseherd....

Selected Resources

In addition to the material presented in the d20 System core rules and system reference documents, you may find these books useful in creating and staging faerie encounters:

Brunner, Chad. *Fey Magic: Dreaming the Reverie*. Encyclopedia Divine. Swindon, UK: Mongoose Publishing, 2002.

King, Brett, Rucht Lilavivat, Tadd McDivitt, and Penny William. *Van Richten's Guide to the Shadow Fey*. Sword & Sorcery. Ravenloft. White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

Phythyon, John R., Jr. *The Little People: A d20 Guide to Faeries*. A Celtic Age Sourcebook. Virginia Beach, VA: Avalanche Press Ltd., 2002.

Wischstadt, Bryon. *D20 Faeries*. Seattle, WA: Bastion Press.

Addictive Substances

By

Daniel J. Bishop

Faerie Fruits

Despite being delicious beyond anything that mortal foods can achieve, the fruits of Elfland are without nutritive substance. Mortals who eat of them are often unable to tolerate mortal foods thereafter, but faerie fruits offer nothing to ward off starvation. Faerie fruits are, therefore, sometimes used as an insidious poison.

Faerie Fruits: Fort DC 16 to avoid addiction; satiated for 1 day after consumption; Fort DC 10 or 1d3 temporary Personality damage when eaten.

Additional Effect: After eating faerie fruits, a mortal cannot eat other food without making a DC 20 Will save. Only one save is allowed each day. The save DC is reduced by 1 for each attempt.

Special: A mortal can help cure another of this addiction by kissing the addicted person with the juice of faerie fruits on her mouth. This satiates the addict for one day, and the Fort save to avoid damage is automatically successful. The kissing mortal must make a DC 16 Will save or permanently lose 1d3 Stamina as the kiss siphons off part of her foison to aid the addict.

- Anyone who purposely takes a drug automatically fails any saves required by the drug.
- If the addiction is not satiated each day, the Fort DC for avoiding temporary Personality damage increases by +2 per day.
- For every month of addiction, the Fort DC increases by +2.
- If the character makes two successful saves, he has fought off the addiction and recovers.
- This drug is magical.

FOISON: The innate goodness of a thing; the part of it that makes it valuable and whole; akin to spirit or soul. In the case of food, foison is the intangible thing that nourishes. Vitamins and minerals, without foison, simply pass through the digestive system unused.

Faerie food is all glamour, without foison. As a result, faeries crave mortal food. This is why brownies, for example, may work for milk and bread. The glamour of faerie food, however, makes it addictive, and makes mortal food seem bland and tasteless in comparison, at least to those who are susceptible to faerie glamour.

Leyworms

Leyworms are an addictive substance manufactured from the small, reddish-brown earthworm snake, which is commonly found along ley lines or faerie trods, as well as near faerie crossroads and power nexuses. The earthworm snake is mummified using special herbs (including several known for their connections to the fey, such as thyme, foxglove, and hellebore), during which it dries and turns black. Leyworm is smoked. The user bites off the tip of the tail, and lights the snake's head, drawing smoke through its body.

Leyworm: Fort DC 5 to avoid addiction; Fort DC 10 or 1 point of temporary Personality damage when used.

Secondary Effect: +CL bonus on any attempt to cast a spell by anchoring to, or utilizing a ley line or power nexus. This effect lasts for 2d4 hours.

Side Effects: There is a 10% chance of spell failure whenever a spell is cast, as the character's heightened connection to ley energy siphons the spell away. This stacks with any other chance of spell failure. This effect lasts for 1d4 hours.

Note that this does not result in a misfire, corruption, or spell loss, but the spell is unavailable to the caster for CL turns.

Overdose: If more than one dose is taken in a 24-hour period, the user immediately takes 1d6 points of temporary Personality damage unless a DC 20 Fort save is successful. Even if the save succeeds, the chance of spell failure is doubled (to 20%, stacking with any other chance of spell failure; this effect lasts for 1d4 days).

Price: 10 gp/dose (individual snake).

Effects of Addiction: 1d3 temporary Personality damage every 10 days without use.

- Anyone who purposely takes a drug automatically fails any saves required by the drug.
- If the addiction is not satiated each day, the Fort DC for avoiding temporary Personality damage increases by +2 per day.
- For every month of addiction, the Fort DC increases by +2.
- If the character makes two successful saves, he has fought off the addiction and recovers.
- This drug is magical.

Zurgâsh

Zurgâsh, or "blue fire" is an addictive fungal substance manufactured by orcs. It is a thick, pale grey paste that, if chewed, turns dark blue. This is accompanied by a burning sensation, as the toxins in the zurgâsh attack the gums, tongue, and palate. These toxins inhibit speech, and stain the gums and tongue a dark blue hue that lasts for several days, giving rise to the drug's human nickname: "dumbwode." Once the drug has been chewed, it must be spit out, or the user may suffer additional poisoning.

The toxins may have other, long-term debilitating effects on the regular user.

Zurgâsh is highly addictive. It is commonly used only by the orcs, who keep clay pots of the drug to bolster guards and warriors. Guards given access to zurgâsh usually have a gong, bell, drum, or similar advice to sound an alarm – although they may be enraged, or lack the wisdom to use it.

Initial Effect: Fort DC 12; muteness lasting 1d4 hours.

Secondary Effect: Fort DC 10; +2d4 temporary hit points. The user gains +2 to hit and +4 damage whenever he enters combat, but must thereafter succeed in a DC 10 Will save to break off combat so long as any enemy remains alive. This effect lasts for 1d6+2 hours.

Side Effects: Each time zurgâsh is used, the user must make a DC 6 Will save or take 1d6 points of temporary Personality damage. At the end of this period, a second DC 6 Will save must be made, or all but 1d6 of the Wisdom damage becomes permanent.

Overdose: If more than one dose is taken in a 12-hour period, the user suffers the same side effects, but the DC for the Will saves increases by +4 for every additional dose taken until the user has gone at least 24 hours without taking another dose.

Swallowing Zurgâsh: A user who swallows this drug is poisoned: Ingested DC 15; 1d6 temporary Stamina damage on a successful save; 1d3 permanent Stamina damage and unconsciousness 1d3 hours on a failed save.

Price: 25 gp/dose (about 3 ounces).

Zurgâsh: Fort DC 14 to avoid addiction; satiated for 2 days after consumption; 1d3 temporary Personality and 1d2 temporary Intelligence damage ever 2 days without use.

- Anyone who purposely takes a drug automatically fails any saves required by the drug.
- If the addiction is not satiated each day, the Fort DC for avoiding temporary Personality damage increases by +2 per day.
- For every month of addiction, the Fort DC increases by +2.
- If the character makes two successful saves, he has fought off the addiction and recovers.

Evensong

by Daniel J. Bishop

No sour note its beauty marred;
I heard the music from afar
And hastened in the orchard night
To dancing candles of fox-fire light,
Where the heavy moon cast silver globes
Upon rings of mushrooms glistening fair
For faerie folk that held court there
Amid the drops of swirling light
In gossamer and cobweb-rob.

Faster and faster the fiddlers played,
Dancing within the enchanted glade.
Round and round the faeries whirled
And in the moonlight madly twirled
To the skirling of their magic song.
The apple trees waved with breeze
By mortals unfelt through autumn leaves
Until, slow-rising there came the dawn,
And with the night the host was gone.

In the orchard's new-day glow,
I heard the music far below.
I heard the sound of dancing fair,
And wished aloud that I were there.

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