



## There's More to Faeries Than Their Glamour

by Kenneth Hite

*"Near the point where the Blue Ridge and the Allegheny Mountains unite, north of Patrick County, Virginia, many little stone crosses have been found.*

*A race of tiny beings.*

*They crucified cockroaches.*

*Exquisite beings - - but the cruelty of the exquisite. In their diminutive way they were human beings. They crucified."*

*- - Charles Fort, The Book of the Damned*

A lot of people hold some very silly notions about faeries, which is unsurprising given that the Gentry are, for the most part, the biggest batch of liars you ever did see. Faeries are cute little iridescent creatures with rainbow wings. Nope. Faeries are sweet and nice, or at least caring and fine. Nope and nope. Faeries are only useful for Historical Medieval Fantasy games, or possibly High Fantasy games if we promise to just call them Elves. Nope, nope, and a third time nope. And I'm not just talking about Urban Fantasy games based on books like Emma Bull's overrated but still quite readable *War For The Oaks* and its myriad heirs, most of which seem to be written by Charles de Lint. (Doing Urban Fantasy gaming correctly really requires a column of its own at least; [remind me](#) to write it some day.) All this would, I'm sure, be cleared up if we had **GURPS Faerie** to refer to, but I'm afraid we don't, yet.

Until then, you'll just have to make do. A copy of [GURPS Fantasy Folk](#) for racial templates, a healthy dollop of [GURPS Celtic Myth](#) for the Sidhe and the nature of the Otherworld, and a copy of the exceptionally - good *Ars Magica* supplement **Faeries** for faerie lore, taxonomy and glamouries should keep the rule-crunchers among you happy for the time being, until some bold champion brings an actual **GURPS Faerie** back from Dom-Daniel. For some campaigning notions, odd crossovers, and ways to look at the Good Folk that may not jibe with your gauzy *Sleeping Beauty* memories, read on.

*"There be three kinds of fairies, the black, the white, and the green, of which the black be the worst."*

*- - The Examination of John Walsh, 1556*

Faerie tales, of course, are actually horror stories; they are literally "tales of the uncanny." Even Happy Fairy Fantasy usually has Evil Fairies to match: Sleeping Beauty's godmother has her Maleficent, the **AD&D** High Elves have the Drow. It's even better when the venom isn't cut with syrup: Raymond Feist's *Faerie Tale* is only one of the surprisingly good pure Faerie Horror novels out there. Any of these novels, or simply reading any really good book of faerie lore (to start, try anything by

Katharine Briggs, especially her truly wonderful *Encyclopedia of Fairies*) will give you literally centuries of leads for horror roleplaying. Faeries connect to every facet of horror: their Teind to hell (a disturbingly foggy notion that the Fair Folk owe Something Big to Lucifer), their conflation with the spirits of the ancient (and often ticked-off) dead, and their predatory lust for human youth (seems awfully vampiric now that I ponder it) shown in the various changeling and faerie lover stories. It's important, when using the Good People as Bad People Indeed in your games, to emphasize the alienness of even the Seelie Court. Between the good offices of Disney and Tolkein, many gamers tend to think of the Elves as sort of ecofriendly romantics with a melanin problem: David Bowie as the Lorax. Nothing works so well for horror as smashing that kind of sentimental illusion - - do it gleefully.

Think about it - - faeries are immortal, merciless, soulless beings who can appear out of nothing, command vast powers, live unseen among humans, work good or ill at whim, and, most fundamentally of all, follow no definable internal logic. Their famous dependence on the literal word of promises or taboos, their mimicry of human societies, their inability to create (or to cast shadows) paint the faerie as hollow men indeed: unguessable simulacra. The faerie are Lovecraftian randomness and ancient survival incarnate. No wonder HPL conflated them with Robert E. Howard's Serpent People and the stunted remnants of the Serpent People with the Lost Race of Arthur Machen. Which leads me to . . .

*"What if the obscure and horrible race of the hills still survived, still remained haunting wild places and barren hills, and now and then repeating the evil of Gothic legend . . ."*

- - Arthur Machen, *The Novel of the Black Seal*

Every age gets things wrong, but few ages get as many things as usefully wrong for roleplaying games as the Victorians. From the works of folklorists like David MacRitchie, and horror writers like Arthur Machen, crept the notion that old legends of the faeries actually refer to the oppressed, physically deformed and stunted, and (by Victorian logic) evil and brutish Former Races (the Picts, who may not actually even have existed as such, were the usual suspects for these eminent scholars) pushed aside by the Celts and Saxons into the hills and caverns of Wales, Scotland and Cornwall. Eventually, deprived of light and nutrition, their old culture forgotten, they devolved into a subhuman race much like Wells' Morlocks in their cannibalism and sundry bad habits. Thinking of the faeries as evil little cannibalistic axe-murderers loitering on the moor behind the monoliths does put rather an unpleasant spin on those fine old songs about Fairy Love By Moonlight and whatnot, doesn't it? Try this experiment: whenever you're reading an especially romantic faerie ballad, substitute "orc" or "goblin" for "fairy" or "elf." Now that you're in the right mood, try looking at that faerie lore from the perspective of a stuffy Victorian anthropologist: pookas turning into dogs, for example, can be stunted dwarves with animal-skin masks, or secret magics, or both, depending on the campaign. For gaming, adapt Machen's novel or Robert E. Howard's derivative but excellent stories of the Lost Race; either Victorian scholars from [GURPS Horror](#) (why is there no *GURPS Victoria*, while I'm on the subject of Books There Oughta Be?) (*Editor's Note: There will be. We've got a writer working on it.*) or stout-thewed warriors from [GURPS Conan](#) can search out the burrows of the Lost Race and find more than they bargained for.

*"On the other hand, it's true that Mescalito drives people crazy, as you said, but that's only when they come to him without knowing what they're doing."*

- - "Don Juan," as quoted by Carlos Castaneda, *A Separate Reality*

Or, of course, there's the slightly more modern anthropologists who call the faeries vegetation spirits: lineal descendants of the Greek dryads. What if they are? What if they exist as physical embodiments of nature; not just Disney Documentary Nature but Nature Red In Tooth And Claw? Such a spirit was Pan, lord of the unreasoning fear called "panic" and the ancestor of Puck, and (in another form) of Robin Hood. Do you dare to run a campaign where the PCs are brave knights of the Sheriff of Nottingham trying to stop the depredations of a band of deadly, devolved, and distinctly un-Merry men in green? It's not a coincidence that the faerie weapon of choice was the bow firing "elfshot," you know.

Or what if they're vegetation spirits of another kind, like Dionysos lord of intoxicating vines: beings in some dimension only breached while ingesting (or inhaling) certain plants? Leprechauns and mushrooms may have more in common than you'd think. This has potential for some Illuminated Secret History; how many social, political and religious movements can you cast retroactively as someone coming down off a hallucinogenic high having received instructions from a Green or Glowing Man? More than you'd think, but I'll give you one to start: the island of Patmos, where St. John was confined while he wrote the *Book of Revelation* is noted for its fine crop of amanita mushrooms.

*"The mind of a person coming out of Fairy-Land is usually blank as to what has been seen and done there."*

- - W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*

The comparisons between faerie kidnappings and UFO abductions, between Evans-Wentz' blank minds and abductees' "missing time," between Men In Black and Men In Green (both colors associated with fairies, UFOonauts, and demons) - - all this makes Jacques Vallee very interested, as I mentioned last column. Plenty of medieval sightings of "fairy ships in the sky" and descriptions of the interiors of fairy mounds as "having torches that burn with no fire" and "shining metal walls" sound awfully familiar in our modern *X-Files* context, don't they? If the faeries and the UFOs are the same, your campaign takes on a whole new dimension, either in time (back millennia) or space (out past the very Dome of Heaven - - or into the Hollow Earth for the Teind). Didn't I say faeries were alien? What if they're aliens? Worse yet, what if they think we are?

*"The games of the ultraterrestrials never end."*

- - John Keel, *Our Haunted Planet*

Keel calls anything that pops into our perception without sufficiently rational warning an "ultraterrestrial" or a "parahuman" - - angels, fairies, demons, devils, devil dogs and phantom cats. That makes things useful; anything weird comes from Otherspace, from Arcadia, Dom-Daniel, Universe-B, the Mauve Zone, hyperspace, Dreamland, Fairy-Land: they're all the same zip code, or at least the same invisible commonwealth. They can manipulate our matter, but are constrained by (and depend on) our thoughts - - that's why UFOs looked like aerial chariots in Biblical times, galleys in the 8th century, airships in the 1890s, and spaceships now. Passing between There and Here happens at weak points, [\*Places of Mystery\*](#) where the mana is high like Loch Ness, or north of Patrick County, Virginia. Magicians can conjure Them and call Them demons (or angels, or elementals, or loa); They can command us (as night-hags, or incubi, or mesmerists, or Mysterious Strangers). This could be the Big Answer that your [\*GURPS Illuminati\*](#) campaign has been looking for: They aren't from around here. When They're here, They can ignore physics but not poetry; They can stop time but not the shot clock. They haven't just killed these

nosy, meddlesome PCs because, to the parahumans, The Conspiracy is just a game  
- - and games have rules, after all. Now, the only question is how do we play?

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