

## **The Blighted Fen**

A traveler who had visited the world now known as the Blighted Fen a thousand years earlier would scarcely recognize the place. Gone are the Hobbleblossoms, replaced by spanish moss. Gone are the Birds-of-Paradise, each one swallowed by the bog or dragged there by bats and starlings. Gone are the great fields of wild blackberries and strawberries, replaced by palmettos and gnarled cypress roots. This hypothetical traveller would remember the old Spriggans, Hobs, and Sprites (known collectively as Tuatha) who had once flown and danced across emerald-green moors, misunderstanding that they had been replaced by, or rather became, the wan-toned Bogies. The riots of butterfly colors and smells of roasting sunflower seeds have been replaced with swamp gas and unwashed Pwck feet. This traveller would indubitably be heartbroken at the state of affairs, but in many ways heartbreak has become the nature of the world. Indeed, there is no known heartbreak greater than that of the Queen of the Tuatha, whose sole love was the first and only of their kind to die. The great castle at the center of the world has become a great mausoleum, rising an immaculate white from the earthy filth below. This is the source, that horrible source, of the blight that has claimed the jolly world this once was, for the mausoleum pours forth great draughts of tears. It is said that these are the tears of the Queen, and it must be so, for her sadness has never known equal.

### **The Nature of the Fen**

The Fen is very much like a fairy tale gone all wrong. It has its origins in primitive morality fables but has since gone to seed. There are fairies of a sort, out of place because of their irreverence. There are woodcutting people there as well, a humble folk sojourning in the Fen for perhaps half an eternity. There is a nasty Hut Witch, too, whose creations bedevil the mortals. Its mostly swamp, but there are dry patches too. A grove of giant pumpkins blossom year-round in the gloom. A gleaming white mausoleum sits atop a green grass hill that hearkens back to its days when the land was a moor. There are two unnamed roads who, like the geography of the Fen, loop back in on themselves endlessly. If you set off in any direction in the Fen, within a week, you'll be right back at that spot.

The people of the Fen look backwards with fondness, remembering more glorious days. For Bogies, it is the bright days of the Tuatha and their King and Queen. For the Pagans, it is the nostalgia of the exile, exalting an image of the lost fatherland. The Animal Gods rage against everyone because they feel so out of place, at least, until someone talks some sense into them. Why go on, though, if everything that is good is gone? Well, that's the trick. The good is still there, maybe just a little less than before. Maybe the goodness is hiding away so that it'll come back that much more glorious for having been gone. Maybe you have to change your perspective on what the Good Life is in order to find it. I'm not that clever and I don't have these answers. I'm just here to tell the story of the Blighted Fen.

### **History of the Blighted Fen**

The world of the Fen was originally the home of the Old Animal Gods, who roamed the place and made it up as they went along. What it was then is anybody's guess. And here's a few: The world was the mating place for Animal Gods so they came here when they were feeling lusty. The world was a sunflower blossom and the Animal Gods were the seeds. The world was originally a carving on a staff, full of animal images, and through some magic the staff became the world. Those very beginning days are existential mysteries. Even Animal Gods are divided on the issue; some are born liars, some are nostalgics, and some don't say anything at all to the likes of you. So really, if you are curious, I'm sorry, but I don't have anything else to say on the subject of the very beginning.

The Animal Gods were basically the most significant geographical features of the early times. Their narratives came together and where they touched their interactions generated landscapes and moral messages. They couldn't get injured or have their feelings hurt but they really didn't have anything resembling long term consequences for the results of their morality tales. Old Possum tricks Old Alligator into biting his own tail (moral: don't be violent). Old Lion gets a helping hand from Old Mouse (moral: be compassionate). Old Turtle gets tricked by Old Crow when he won't come out of his shell (moral: he loses his berries because he is not intellectually curious). The world would have looked, from the outside, much like a patchwork quilt of differing textures. Each patch would be one of the Animal Gods and whatever environment would make sense for them to be in. The world probably didn't have a fancy name for itself. It never had a reason to be that self-critical. Eventually the stories were all told out and every Animal God had already established a relationship with every other Animal God. They continuously retread the same narrative ground they had been exploring for centuries.

The Animal Gods lost their way and many of them faded from disuse. Those ones had a single, final narrative that played out with their destruction, often in exaggerated moral fashion. Old Lion gets trampled by Old Elephant who is scared of Old Mouse (moral: Don't betray a benefactor). Old Elephant gets his when Old Tiger ambushes him, but Old Tiger chokes on his bones and perishes (moral: none really, just poetic justice I suppose?). Old Rabbit gets the better of Old Wolf, who falls to his death (moral: I'm not exactly sure. Life is cruel, maybe?). The moral messages were even getting diluted. Things were not looking good. Too many conflicting stories told too many times about platonic animal beings. Too primitive to survive long.

### **The Tuatha**

A new element was introduced in the form of a court of fairy-like beings who began to inhabit the various stories as lesser characters. These creatures were window-dressing for the tales of the Animal Gods, fated to perform minor narrative tasks like delivering messages, tasting wine, and spying on unfaithful lovers. They seem to spring up (sometimes literally) around feasts and good omens in the places once inhabited by the destroyed Animal Gods. They were a little less crude, but like the Animal Gods before their great extinction, they don't seem to suffer any kind of meaningful injury or death. Their stories are more complex and often lack any moral component. Indeed, these creatures have free will of a sort. A contender for control of the narrative is now on the scene.

After a while there were a lot of these things and Old Moth called them Tuatha. Animal Gods love having Tuatha around but in time they moved away from the Animal Gods who seemed to dwindle or go who-knows-where. Tuatha took center stage because there were just not as many Animal Gods. No Seahorse God, no Termite God, and no Caribou God. Some of the Animal Gods resented having their place taken, as the Tuatha inhabited the lands left from the forgotten animal fables. But, who can stay mad at them long? They are resourceful! The Tuatha have magic. They make the land sing for them. It spirits them to safety when the angry ones come around and the Moth God protects their feelings from the hurtful things Animal Gods can say. Others find ways to flatter and please the Animal Gods, so they make friends. They like it very much.

So the Tuatha kept the peace through their ingenuity. They multiplied as things got better. More good omens means more Tuatha. They chose leaders; a King and Queen. They were the epitome of what it means to be Tuatha. They had all the good qualities of their kind; they were beautiful, they were strong, they were brilliant, and they were most virtuous. Wherever they went, they did great acts of all kinds. They built mines to get beautiful gems and set elaborate

traps to separate the Animal Gods when they struggled against one another. They learned the language of the Moths and they gave jobs to all the Tuatha (paid them for it, even!). They proved their worthiness to be King to even the most curmudgeonly Tuatha and even composed a ballad about it. When anyone hurt themselves, they knew the ways to make it feel better and no one, not even the Animal Gods, knew their way around the world like the King and Queen did.

They even built themselves a castle and polished it to a gleaming perfect white that shone through in a world that was already so vivid-hued. They brought all of the Tuatha to them for a great census of their people. They bestowed titles upon their lessers and gave their various permutations names. The hairy, small ones they referred to as Hobs, for they hid in chimneys and slept in hearth's pots when they weren't in use. They were cup-bearers for the Animal Gods, attendants to their great feasts. The surly hill folk they called Spriggans and they worked the King and Queen's mines. Although sour of demeanor, they were humble and hardworking people of an essentially good nature. The King himself excelled at the Spriggan tradition of bowling. Sprites flit about in the upper reaches, playing tag with Old Butterfly and the whole of the aerial world. The land itself seemed to love Sprites, for the very plants would reach out for them when they want rest, pour its nectars forth for them at will, and even stones would turn away from them in mid-throw.

See what I was saying earlier? The Tuatha have hijacked this narrative and it is now theirs. The Animal Gods were usurped. None of the Tuatha complained; they suddenly found that their adventures were just a little more interesting. Plus, everyone was tired of the same animal fables over and over again. That is a difficult thing, though, because the Animal Gods weren't so happy about the situation and they got about seven shades angrier. The story is a happy one, though: the Tuatha were still charming enough to keep them from breaking into violence.

Everyone thought it would come to violence, though. Somewhere along the way an old Witch moved into the world because something caught her eye. Maybe she wanted to grind up Tuatha for potions. Maybe she needed the bones of the Animal Gods for her spells. Personally, I think she probably just thought it was pretty. The Animal Gods weren't so sure she was the beneficial sort, and besides, her ways just seemed to make them angry. The Tuatha made a pact with her that they would protect her from the Animal Gods if she agreed to a pact of non-interference. She agreed, with one stipulation, namely that she be allowed to harm any Tuatha who broke one of three rules in their interactions with her. Further, she asked that her rules remain a secret, but that she would reveal it to the King and Queen. They signed the pact and honored the secret, but issued an edict that the Tuatha never interact with the Hut Witch so that they not break her secret rules. The witch gave her hut enchanted legs that carry her from place to place and was never again troubled by the Animal Gods.

Fantastic plants and animals roamed the world. One flower, the Hobbleblossom, sneezed when in the presence of a Hob, to much hilarity. Birds of Paradise were neon-colored birds that could change the colors of their feathers by deliberate action. Some types of local thistles were known to join in during the chorus of some drinking songs. Sprites often made friends with the clouds, but clouds live such short lives that they were often gone before the conversation finished. The Queen's radiance created artificial daytimes when she went out during the night. The King was a blaze of glory with diamond armor and a shield of empyrean.

Things got rather sad after he was gone.

## **The Blight**

Some Spriggans had set up bowling pins, a game they all loved. Spriggans prided themselves on their skill at bowling to perhaps an unreasonable degree. However, even their love of bowling was trumped by their love of the Tuatha King and indeed it was a high honor to lose to him. He was undefeated. Well, after a particularly sumptuous banquet the likes of which have not been seen since, the King challenged a number of Spriggans to a match of bowling and the pins were set up. To everyone's surprise, the King lost, albeit by a very close margin. Somewhat wistful at his coming up short, he retired to bed early. He did not wake in the morning, at the Queen's discovery. The Tuatha did not know death and yet, somehow, their King had fallen. His loss was completely alien to the Tuatha and they could make no sense of it. Something in the Tuatha died that morning and they faded a little in their grief. The Sprites stopped flying. The Spriggans came up from the mines. The Hobs left their nooks. Those things didn't matter any more and their old ways died along with part of their nature. Many Tuatha ceased to exist, overcome with sadness and confusion.

The Queen ordered a funeral to be held until such time as she ordered it complete. She tasked a few of her gifted subjects to remake the castle as a shining white mausoleum for her beloved and it was done. She ordered her retinue disbanded, but kept three of her closest Handmaidens with her. Ordering everyone out of the mausoleum, she had it shut upon her and her Handmaidens. It has not opened since. However, the Queen's tears flow like ten mighty rivers out of every window and pore of what was once her castle. The world darkened, literally and figuratively, and clouds rolled in and blotted out the sunbeams. It rained but it was not enough to flood the land. However, the Queen's tears inundated everything yet. The moors and forests were transformed into marshes and mud holes. Many Animal Gods died as the animals they once embodied were wiped out. The new swamp seem to react against what remained of the old order. The Birds of Paradise were dragged into the swamp by teams of sparrows and bats. Swamp vines choked Hobbleblossoms into nothingness. Alligators were the kings of the land in the absence of a Tuatha sovereign.

The Queen has never called off the funeral, and technically, it is still going on in the form of the Heydeguy Circle. It is customary to dance around the circle singing "Hey! Deggy deggy deggy! Hey! Deggy deggy deggy!". This is a very old dance, older than the endless funeral, certainly. It is probably the first song ever sung in this world or something very much close to that. As long as the Tuatha could keep the Heydeguy in their minds, they would never truly forget their nature. However, their nature is clearly altered. The Tuatha were no more. Those that remained were wraith-like, stained by the terrible knowledge of death. The Queen and her Handmaidens have never emerged to take stock of the changes that have happened, but if they did, they would find the world full of Bogies instead of Tuatha. They don't talk to nobody, though, sealed away with what is left of their beautiful King.

Those Bogies who remembered the Heydeguy and the language of the Moths became known as the Weem. Those who loved the land, even in its most fallen state, became Pwcks. The ones who seemed consumed by confusion and anger became Redcaps and their morbidity became the thing that kept them in the flesh. The Animal Gods were made even angrier for the state of the world that the Tuatha had left it, but their fury was quickly overcoming their ability to direct the anger in any rational way. It seemed as if the Animal Gods would be lost to their rage.

Without leadership, the Bogies had a hard time of things. They seemed to have much less purpose, and it was purpose that gave them solidity. Their language changed slightly to reflect their new natures. This was no longer the language of the Moth God, but something more aloof that doesn't sound so fancy.

### **The Great Pagan Migration**

One particularly dark day in the Fen, some people showed up from somewhere else. They all had axes and the expression of a whipped dog. They came from a place so wild, that if you didn't look out, a tree might grow right on top of you. At least, that's how they told it. "What were they doing?" you might ask. The answer is that they were chopping down trees, trying to make a shrine for their most treasured artifact. They were killing defenseless animals, slapping each other on the back when someone bagged one they didn't know back home. They were lighting fires in the peat, admiring the green flames that issued forth. They pissed on the Crossroads and left rotting animal carcasses everywhere, which as you can imagine, generated a goodly number of flies.

This made the Bogies mighty angry, to say the least. They swooped down on them and gave them a mighty scare. They came with their faces all painted up like skulls to show that the path the foreigners were taking would lead only to more death. But the invaders had no understanding of the land in which they trespassed, so they ignored the Bogies because they refused to spill blood. They weren't scared at all. They were haughty. Arrogant. They treated the Fen like they owned it. Wherever they went they left smoke, shit, and flies. Something had to be done.

The Bogies called these people Pagans, for it was clear that they were an unsophisticated people from a distant place no one had heard of. The Pagans revered their sacred artifact, a thing called a Sampo. When the blood of a mortal was fully shed upon its altar, one of its four great mouths belched forth a quantity of a valuable substance; flour, gold, salt, or fresh water. The Sampo was the Pagan's reason for coming to the Fen, for an unknown invader had spoiled their previous home in its pursuit of the Sampo, or so the Pagans proclaimed. The truth of the matter is unknown because Pagans have no concept of history and their lives are far too short to have any real perspective on the matter. The Weem were the first to realize the nature of the Sampo was as the center of what was clearly a death-cult. Pagans had no compunction murdering one another for their daily bread (literally). The Pwck already wept for the innocent alligator and squirrel blood that they spilled. The Redcaps wanted to transform themselves into living nightmares and slaughter the lot of them, but the Weem knew that the fearful wailing of their children would make the Fen so sad that it would melt into nothingness. This problem could not be solved with bloodshed, for bloodshed was at the heart of the Pagans' crimes. A plan was hatched.

In time, the great Shrine of the Sampo was completed at the cost of many cypress tree's lives. The Pagans had a great feast of salted alligator tail and gold-foiled crow pie. They drank stale beer and ruttied like swamp apes. Their shamans tore the hearts out of many living subjects so that they might brew more beer to replace their dwindling supply. The conclusion of their festival was to carry the great bloody Sampo to the Shrine where an ornately carved alcove had already been whittled. To get there, they had to cross through deep swamp water which came up to their neck. This was where the Bogies would solve their Sampo problem.

The Weem remembered something that the Moth God had taught them a long, long time ago. They used this trick in the times of the Tuatha to play practical jokes. When a Spiggan came up from his hole with a giant gem, it was always good fun to put a hex on him and make him drop it right back into the earth. A good time. This hex was still efficacious and don't-you-know they let it loose on those poor overburdened Pagans. Sploosh. That nasty Sampo was claimed by the Fen itself and no power, mortal or otherwise, was gonna dredge it back up to the surface. The looks on the faces of those Pagans is the thing of legends. They didn't say a thing for days. Some of them didn't say another thing for the rest of their lives, short though they are. That last

batch of beer never got made, either. They got a taste of the Queen's heartbreak that day and it never left them, let me tell you. That's all it took to take the blood-lust out of the those strange, foreign tree-hewers.

### **Recent Memory**

The Pagans were done making a nuisance of themselves and when they realized that the Fen was their new home, they got mighty interested in how they were going to fill their bellies without the Sampo. They learned to fear the Animal Gods, who got even angrier so that now they don't even talk before they rip into you. They have been driven mad by heartbreak, jealousy, and the pain of being too old for your own good. The Pagans needed to figure something out and quick. They were contrite for their previous savagery and replanted all the trees they cut down. That's the law of the land, now. If you cut down a tree, you plant a new one. You kill an animal, you take the time to thank the Animal God it descends from, even if that particular one isn't around anymore. They even made an effort to show the Bogies just how sorry they were, and promised to leave them gifts on the porch of their huts in recognition that they were settling in a place that already had inhabitants. Without their Sampo, they had to learn the art of farming, which ain't easy even when your world isn't waterlogged with tears. They promised to periodically leave gifts on their porches for the Bogies. Sometimes the Bogies wouldn't pass by that particular village for a long while so some settlements don't give anything to the Bogies. They still probably have a shirt laid out for when a Bogie does come by.

The culture of the Fen is a mish-mash of Animal God customs, old half-remembered reinterpretations of Tuatha ritual, Pagan customs and styles, and Bogie morbidity. The language spoken in the Fen by mortal, Bogie, and Animal God alike is a combination of Tuatha, Bogie, and Pagan tongues into a kind of pidgin language more complex than its components. The Weem still remember the language of the moths, but speaking it is difficult and few can do it. There are very few Bogies who remember hearing it spoken. After all these years, most of the original Bogies who were originally Tuatha have become Willowisps and gone into the darkness of death. There might be someone out there who was a part of those days, but they don't make it known. Nostalgia is deadly dangerous to Bogies.

These days, things have mostly calmed down. Pagans come into being and they stay for a while and then they leave forever. Bogies still do their dance and the Animal Gods still rage even though they don't even remember what it is they started raging about. The Fen gets hungrier the more time passes, though. I guess it got a taste of that Sampo and decided that it liked eating things. Sometimes, the swamp will pull you under the muck and you better kick real hard to get out. If you aren't so lucky and you don't have the mojo with you, it'll suck you right into the bog and it won't let go. When the land claims you, there are no bubbles. If folks were drowning like that, you'd see bubbles coming up. In situations like this, its just perfectly-satisfied-placid. The Fen makes you its possession and it doesn't let any part of you go, not even your last breath. Now, some folks say that you got eaten by the bog because even Bogies don't come back. That might be true. Some folks say the Fen is hollow, that there are caverns underneath and the only way to get there is when the swamp pulls you in with its muddy undertow. That could be true. If you pressed me on the issue, I'd be reluctant to speculate, but if you asked me real sweet like, I might give you my perspective. I think some of those folks, maybe not all, but a goodly few end up in the place that lies beyond the Fen.

I can already see you asking "The Fen doesn't have borders, you ninny!" which isn't even a question. It doesn't have borders if you go left or right. If you walk east from the Mausoleum, you'll travel for about a week before you approach the Mausoleum from the west. Go north, in a few days you'll be coming up on the Mausoleum from the south. You go one way, it doesn't

matter which one, and you'll end up right where you started. So how do you leave the Fen? Not left or east or up. You go down. That's right. Down. Of course, the Fen isn't gonna let you go where you want to. It'll drown you before you could swim there. If you try and dig there, you'll just end up face-deep in muck. So if you get bit by the Wandering Bug (that's not even a real bug), don't go do a fool thing and try to leave. If the Fen wants you to go, you'll go. If it doesn't... well... don't go drowning your damned self over it.

So how did all those Pagans get here? I dunno. That's another mystery whose answer won't be found in the Blighted Fen.

## Bogie Society

Bogies who had once been Tuatha are Tuatha no longer. Consequently, they are no longer Spriggans, Sprites, and Hobs. It would be a clean sort of symmetry if the old Tuatha types of fairies corresponded to one of the various types of Bogies. For instance, it might seem that Weem are the natural inheritors of the Sprite niche. However, after the sadness transformed the Tuatha into Bogies, they were not neatly sorted into the classifications. Nothing, even symmetry, stays clean long in the Fen, you see. Some Sprites became Weem while some became Pwck and Redcaps. Some had no visible classification at all, and many of those became Willowisps, consumed by their very emptiness. No Spriggans, Sprites, or Hobs were left; something in the Tuatha nature died along with their King and was replaced with a deep sadness that is at once both magical and mundane. Bogies, it should be noted here, do not believe in fairies.

Some Bogies don't fit into classification at all. Oddballs. There's nothing wrong with that, really. But some folks say that if you don't have "a calling" then its easier to lose yourself and become a Willowisp. Everyone has to have a reason to keep moving on, after all. If protecting nature, policing Pagans, or hording secrets isn't your thing, what exactly *is* your thing?

## Pwck (Pronounced: Pook)

No vowels means no civilizing influences! The Pwcks have a sort of a duality to them; their connection to the Animal Gods is greater than that of other Bogies but they know that part of their nature is death. Pwcks make it their business to track the Animal Gods and either placate them or trick them away from Pagan settlements as an act of compassion to both the Pagans and the Animal Gods. Many Pwck were Hobs who had once had a close relationship with one of the Animal Gods, serving as a part of their mythology when their stories were falling out of favor. When the Tuatha darkened, many remained at the side of their Animal God until it eventually drove them off.

The word 'Pwck' has mysterious origins. Pwcks are sneaky, and the name may be what they are often said to exclaim when they reappear and scare someone... "Pook!" However, owing to their animal nature, it might be that Pwck is either a corruption of or the origin of a certain very naughty four letter word that sounds very much like "Puck". Although animalistic, Pwck never have animal features, save perhaps the blacked out nose of a fox or pointed ears. Not all Pwck share this feature; some have wings instead of pointed ears and some have a perfectly human face save for the sallow complexion of a corpse and a case of morbid, bleeding lesions.

Pwcks like to scare people and by people I mean Pagans. They don't particularly mind giving the heebie jeebies to the people they continuously rescue. Pwck have made great sport of scaring the piss out of Pagans, jumping out of hiding and just frightening the everloving hell out of them. They don't, of course, do it to Pagans in the act of woodcutting (even though they hate

it when Pagans cut down trees). They discovered that an armed Pagan's reflex when scared for their life is generally to swing at the thing that scared them. Pagans are strong. As soon as the word 'Pook!' is out of your mouth, they are already determining where their second attack will land. Pwcks still go out of their way to protect Pagans, as the Pwcks know that the Fen can't handle too many more tragedies.

Pwcks are said to be brought into being when an Animal God actually kills a truly innocent person. Perhaps, this might be the Fen's way of regulating the anger of the fallen Animal Gods. The presence of new Pwcks is a sad thing in the eyes of Bogies. I'm not saying that the Pwck created by the shedding of innocent blood is the person's ghost, but I know you were thinking it already. Personally, I'd bet that its more likely the innocent's imaginary friend given life by the Fen. But who knows, really?

Hey, maybe their name is "Spook" but with a lisp? Dammit, we'll never know the origin of the word.

### **Weem (Pronounced: Veem)**

Weem resemble the old Tuatha the most, but it makes them the most tarnished of all. Old Moth (Dubbed Mother Moth by the Weem) always liked the fairy creatures, and when they suffered as they did, she gave them blessings. The Weem remember two important things; the language of the moths (the Old Tongue) and the Heydeguy circle. The Old Language was given to the Tuatha by Old Moth and it is the Bogie's link to their former incarnations. Weem are known for being somewhat sorcerous, not unlike the Hut Witch. They don't eat folks, though. They brew strange things, not just for supper and not just for mojo. The Weem know the secrets of mushing up herbs and boiling them. They call it Alchemy.

The word "Weem" means something in the language of the moths, which only the Weem know and not even all the Weem know it. If you ask them what it means they will smile knowingly and say nothing at all. Weem are usually learned, and they dabble in strange things like machinery and applied economics. They also study history, a task that further ties them to the Tuatha of old. Weem are full of mysterious wisdom like that of a fairy or a irreverent monk. If a Weem has the patience to look into themselves, they find all kinds of secrets in the depths of their shadowy souls. Your guess is as good as mine as to what these secrets are. We probably don't want to know, really.

The Weem have a very close connection to the Fen itself and this relationship grants the Weem the love of the land, much like that enjoyed by the Sprites of old. It is true that some Weem glitter against the moonlight when they do their Heydeguy circle. Not all Weem have wings and fairydust, though; many have blacked out noses and eyes that give a Weem the look of a grinning skull. Others have the look of a bloated swamp-corpses with pale skin streaked with mud. A gathering of Weem for the Heydeguy is a strange visual experience, as sprightly horrors dance with horrific sprites.

Weem are said to come into being when a hundred and one moths die by flying into a torch and their bodies subsequently form a perfect circle around the torch. A rare occurrence, certainly, but the Weem are a rarefied breed. Many Weem were court sorcerers or scholars for the Queen in ancient times. Although the Queen has kept her three closest Handmaidens with her, some of the current Weem once served in that capacity. It is said that the Queen mourns the King, but the Weem mourn the Queen, for she is, in many ways, just as much a casualty of fate as her husband.

## **Redcaps (Pronounced: Oh come on, you can read can't you? Its pronounced Redcap!)**

Redcaps originally came from the Honor Guard of the King, essentially the Tuatha military. In those days, the red of the cap was a sign of elite station in service of the King. Now, it is a threat aimed at any, Pagan, Bogie, Animal God, or Witch, who threatens the Fen. You've all heard the story about them dipping their hat in the blood of their victims and somesuch. Truth of the matter is, all of that is just Redcap public relations. The logistics of keeping a hat bright red with blood in the Fen are just impossible, even with all the healing they do. It is true that some Redcaps certainly have dipped their hats in blood, but they can hardly be expected to go romping around nabbing Pagans for their blood every time it rains a little. No, they use palmetto berries. It just lasts longer. Of course, that's not something to wave in their face. They just might decide that they need to borrow some blood from you.

Anyways, the Redcaps have widely been held as the overseers of the Pagans, who are alien to the Fen and don't always understand the consequences of their actions. Bogies like to terrify Pagans, and for this purpose Redcaps don morbid persona and spout gallows humor. They never stoop to threats of course, but they rarely have to since many of them look like pale, bleeding corpses or gothic murder princesses. If a Pagan transgresses enough to warrant it, like killing of another Pagan (Bogies don't count), a Redcap will learn of it and execute the offender in the night. The Fen is blighted with tears of heartbreak, it is inappropriate to stain it further with blood. This is part of the reason Redcaps stain their hats; it is part of a ritual that prevents the violence from corrupting the Fen further.

It is in the spirit of preventing bloodshed that many Redcaps practice the art of healing. The Fen can be dangerous, what with its angry Animal Gods, Willowisps, poison snakes, and swamp disease. It is widely held that the Fen is blighted further by the shedding of blood and the last thing this place needs is another pair of crying eyes. Pagans are mortals but they have very few skilled physicians amongst their number. Whatever part of the Bogie soul remembers their time as Tuatha also remembers where to apply pressure to stop bleeding. Thus, Bogies are often called to act as doctors for the Pagans, which accounts for a substantial amount of the interaction the two cultures have.

Redcaps are born when a Pagan drowns another Pagan. Inauspicious beginnings, indeed. Many Redcaps meet up at the Crossroads and this is a sacred place for the Redcaps. There are gallows there and a road sign so old it doesn't even say anything anymore. This place is full of dark, dank mojo. If you feel like doing some powerful greater doodads of mojo, this would be a place to do it. The Redcaps know one such working that turns Bogies into living nightmares, but its not the kind of thing you want to do very often if you can help it. Hell, I don't think its ever been done.

## **Bogie Customs**

Although you get little Bogie subcultures and whatnot, Bogies are a robust people unto themselves. Their ways are often half-remembered recapitulations of Tuatha ritual taken out of its original context. For instance, the Heydeguy was a Tuatha performance, put on to amuse Animal Gods. Later, it became a past-time for all Tuatha, King and Queen included. When the King passed on, the Bogies did it to honor their sovereigns in an eternal funereal wake. Now days, you do it to show that you aren't a Willowisp come up from the bog to cause a ruckus. Everyone knows a Willowisp can't dance the Heydeguy.

Bogies have customs as a group but they are just as likely to collect their own little habits and rituals. Its true some Bogies won't enter a place until they've invited their shadow in first. Its really quite rude to interrupt such a ritual even though the shadow never takes the

kindness given. Some Bogies can't stand to wear symmetrical clothing. Some people have to always be the center of attention. I once knew a Bogie who collected teeth because he thought they were good luck. Sometimes they chase things around that no one can see but that one Bogie. Maybe they are just pretending. Who knows. Some Bogies like to lecture. Sometimes about history. Sometimes about how you've made a muck of things. They can be carefree, hidebound, morbid, and hilarious. Bogies like to drink, too. And bowl. And even fight sometimes. Some Bogies like to check and see if Pagans have a gift for them and then generously refuse the gift at the last moment. A Bogie can keep a Pagan out of trouble for a long time asking to see their gift and then refusing it.

Bogies don't hunt animals. That might offend the Animal Gods. They don't cut down trees or burn things without good reason. Bogies don't curse and they don't take kindly to cursing. There's no sense bringing all that ugly into the world. Bogies don't murder although there are those Bogies who are quite skilled at bloodletting. Most Bogies know their way around the Fen. They don't get caught in quicksand very often. Like ghosts, it can be very hard to track them because if you don't know what you are doing, its unlikely you'll find one even with a bloodhound. They don't shy away from lending a helping hand, especially to relieve the suffering and sadness of the Fen's folk. They have uncommon knowledge of bodily things, its true. Bogies make excellent embalmers and sawbones, I hear, and many Redcaps keep their hats the desired tone by mopping up after a chiurgery.

### **Bogie Nature**

So Bogies are flesh-and-blood but that's not the end of the story. There's definitely something weird going on there. Part of them is dead, for sure, but I'm not sure if its the soul part or the flesh part. Some Bogies look like dead people in a lot of ways. Not all do, though, but they definitely don't look human either. If you wanna take the middle-of-the-road path (we all know what happens to people who stand in the middle of the road, don't we? They get run over!) you could say that some of their soul passed on and some of their living self passed on, too. Ain't that nice and neat? That explains a lot of things, really.

If a Bogie is physically destroyed they reform, remembering what has occurred, either in their bed or in the nearest Heydeguy Circle. See, Bogies don't die exactly. Whats far more likely to happen is that a Bogie will just forget their living self and fixate on the dead part. They become a Willowisp. Its not really polite to talk about these things because it creeps Bogies out to think about it, but a Willowisp is a swamp ghost that pulls dead bodies up out of the swamp and walks around in their dead meat. That's right. They jump into that bog mummy and use it to torment the living. Now, because Willowisps are a Bogie problem, they got to have a Bogie solution. Its their responsibility to drive off a Willowisp. That usually ends the problem there, but sometimes a Willowisp just keeps coming back with new bodies and doesn't seem to rest. Well... I don't know what to do in that situation. Watch your back, I guess.

Physical annihilation isn't the only thing that makes a Bogie go Willowisp. A Bogie can do it to their own damn selves if they get too dark for their own good. Its pretty easy to get obsessed with death, too, so this is a real trap for Bogies. It scares the hell out of Bogies (who pride themselves on their other-worldliness) because its always out there, lurking. It can get to the best of the Bogies, literally, because it has already taken the King. Whose next? Which one of y'all are going to be claimed first?

Some Bogies have pointed ears, like that of the extinct Fox God. They are the ones most likely to prick up their ears at the first peep of danger. Some Bogies have black noses like a hound or a bear. They don't have a sense of smell like a beast but I hear that some folks can sniff out

when there is great Mojo at work. You have to imagine that this particular characteristic derives from the ancient connection between the Tuatha and the Animal Gods. I'd testify that Bogies still show the marks of their origins and the Pwcks are the ones who show it most proudly. Some Bogies with cave-dark noses paint their faces white to look intimidating, but anything more morbid than that and a Bogie is liable to slip themselves away as a nasty Willowisp. Some Bogies have wings. Most people would owe that to the fact that some of the Tuatha, namely the Sprites, used to fly about in the heavens. Bogies don't or can't do that. Some of them still have wings though. In a similar vein, some Bogies sparkle like the stars. I'd suppose these are just relics of the high age of the Tuatha. The Weem are most likely to have vestigial wings or radiant skin but I don't know what to make of that. It is said that the Sprites were minuscule but that they grew up when they had their tiny hearts broken, so they would have been much smaller, anyways. After the King bought the farm, a whole lot of the Bogies got to looking like they were dead too. Their skin turned sallow pale with yellow highlights. Dark red lesions blossomed across their skin. It doesn't take a whole lot of brains to know that these are the Bogies who show the marks of the current age. I guess that makes the Redcaps "tres a la mode" because they are the ones who most often possess that particular brand of hideous.

## **Death**

The Tuatha didn't spend a jot of thought on the subject of death. It was true that sometimes an Animal God got eaten or squished. Sometimes a tree that you love don't come back one spring. Sometimes your hero doesn't wake up. Tuatha had to learn the hard truth about death first hand. They just couldn't believe in it until they felt it. With the transformation into Bogies, the truth became clear. Still, Bogies are immortal. To a lesser or greater degree. Its true that each time they come to be destroyed, they return to being. Still, they know that non-existence is a possibility. Its true that some of the Tuatha live on as Bogies even to the present. A small minority of all Bogies, to be sure. They have seen their fellows become Willowisp, living on now only as memories. They had names and they played merrily, but they aren't any place you could travel to. They're gone. Dead. This says nothing of the King. That's a whole different can of worms. Because of what happened with the King, the Bogies don't need death-rites. Their whole culture, I reckon, is a death-rite.

Pagan mortality is horrible and problematic for Bogies (a horrible problem, if you will). Pagans die all the time. Probably at least one somewhere every day. How many children will mourn them? What do you do with the body? How will their possessions be divided? These are considerations that Bogies must, as stewards of the Blighted Fen, see to. Redcaps traditionally perform the function of dealing with Pagan mortality, but any Bogie can see to it. Hell, the Fen loves it when someone steps in and lessens the sadness. Pagans have their own death rituals and the Bogies don't interfere with those. They don't participate either. The death of a Pagan, under certain circumstances, can bring a Bogie into being. A Pwck is created when an Animal God slays an Innocent. And it is also true that sometimes a Pagan has gone so wrong in the brainpan that someone needs to put him down like a rabid dog. That's the Redcap's duties and no one else's. A Redcap comes into being when a Pagan murders one of their own you can bet they come into the world looking to punish the offender. Redcaps can execute Pagans without bringing more undue sadness to the Fen, although how this is accomplished is unclear, even to me, your learned narrator.

## **Food**

Bogies don't need food to live but who doesn't like eating? Redcaps and Pwcks don't really know how to cook. Actually, that's pretty merciful. Redcap cuisine would probably involve scabs. Pwcks would liberally season their food with toenails. No, perish the thought. They don't cook as a matter of pride. But Weem, they love to cook. Most of them have kettles.

When they are at home, it seems like they are always boiling something. Maybe a magic potion. Maybe some tea. Maybe a stew. Weem harvest their own ingredients, like swamp cabbage, wild oats, and salt rock. Pwcks know of secret thickets where you can find spicy chili peppers and Redcaps pick wild onions grown on the unmarked graves of criminals. Bogies don't really kill animals, but they aren't against trading for meat with Pagans. I happen to know a number of Weem who make a beef stew worth dying for. The old King of the Tuatha himself was known to participate in the Wild Hunt against some poor prey animal, much to the consternation of that animal's representative God. Therefore, Bogies generally do not condemn the eating of meat. They don't butcher anything themselves though.

### **Bogie Celebrations**

Bogies don't exactly have a calendar. The Weem have a system of recording the passing of the whiles but it's not the kind of thing you keep with numbers. You can count the days until you're blue in the face, but that doesn't mean you know what time of the year it really is. Bogies look for signs that the seasons are changing or maturing and mark the time by that. This leads to a certain number of arguments about what time of the year it is, for sure. If a Bogie borrowed a lucky frog skull from a friend until High Autumn, they might not agree on whether or not the criteria for that time has been satisfied. The Tuatha used to delineate periods of time by the colors of their King and Queen's garments. You'll have to forgive the Bogies for abandoning the custom, though, otherwise the Fen would be in an eternal season cloaked in the blacks of mourning.

Well. Actually. I suppose that might already be the case, come to think of it...

### **Autumn and the Witch's Moot**

High Autumn is known by the ripening of pumpkins outside of the Pumpkin Patch, where they are ripe and massive all year long. When most Bogies in a region agree that High Autumn is upon the Fen, they celebrate the Witch's Moot, when Bogies retreat to various parties thrown in the darkest, most secluded places of the Blighted Fen. Most Bogies will count it as the beginning of a new year. It's a good time to be a Weem because everyone else will treat you like royalty. That's because everyone acts like the Weem; they trade secret-for-secret with everyone. This is how information gets around. Even the loneliest sad-sack-of-a-Redcap turns out for the Witch's Moot. Everyone comes to the table with a host of secrets. And who has spent the whole year gathering up those secrets? Yeah, it's the Weem.

Low Autumn is when the Swamp Oaks lose their leaves. Once those leaves start hitting the ground, you know Autumn is on its way out. You'll get some stodgy folk who'll argue that the season hasn't changed, but even they can't argue the point if you can see your breath. That's classic Low Autumn. To the Tuatha, the Low Autumn time for sober rites of thankfulness. Even then, Autumn was a time of melancholy. The King and Queen wore earth tones and spoke hushedly where they went. The Tuatha knew that this signalled the coming of Autumn.

### **Winter and the Feast of the Animal Gods**

The Bogies celebrate nothing in Winter; it is bitter cold and misty with humidity. Pagans, however, celebrate the Feast of the Animal Gods, a high festival that toasts whatever Animal God is currently in vogue in that particular village. They perform whatever high rites they know to perform for that Animal God. High Winter is known by the bitter winds that cut through the Blighted Fen, chilling everyone to their core. If you deny that High Winter is upon the land, your friends will ask you to prove it by walking outside with arms outstretched and no coat. Better to just admit it.

Low Winter doesn't always happen, in fact. Low Winter begins with the first snow, which sometimes never comes. When it does snow in the Fen, it is bitterly cold and wet. The swamp never freezes over, but it does kill the swamp plants, leaving a droopy, fetid mess. The Rushes are not so much fun in Low Winter.

### **Spring and the Feast of the Sampo**

High Spring is known when the honeysuckle blossom. Bogies get all rankled up when they see these pert little flowers because it means only one thing: the Feast of the Sampo. Pagans butcher large amounts of livestock for the occasion. The Fen's sulfurous swamp gas is momentarily overpowered by the smell of roasting meats of a multitude of varieties. But, it is true that some Wise Old Ones suffer the gout, and as any Wise Old One can tell you, too much meat will inflame the gout. So there is a great quantity of potatoes both of a the mashed and baked variety. All of this bounty is consumed in memory of the Sampo, which was taken by the Fen as the cost of their sojourn. So fill your cup with fermented swamp cabbage and throw a heavy ball with your friends, its Sampo's Day!

Low Spring is identified by reptiles, like turtles and alligators, laying eggs. The air is thick with pollen and whirly-gigs. Bogies clean out their dwellings, assuming they have one. Otherwise they do their yearly clothes washing. If you accidentally sneak up on a naked Bogie doing his washing, do yourself a favor and just walk away. You don't want to know what happens if you don't.

### **Summer and the Grand Heydeguy**

High Summer is hot, basically. Some Bogies might object to notions of it being "hot". However, any Bogie denying the onset of Summer has to undergo, as a sacred duty, the "Forehead Test". Two impartial judges not known as liars touch the denier's forehead in an attempt to detect sweat or an overabundance of sweat, signalling recent sweating. If moisture of any type is detected, High Summer is upon the Fen.

Low Summer is so hated, its often called the "The Big Stink". You know its Low Summer because of the... ahem... fragrance. It is during the Low Summer that Bogies perform the Grand Heydeguy, a magical rite of mourning. The execution of this rite is the sacred charge of all Bogies. It begins slow, as Bogies walk the circle (traditionally, although not always, at the Pumpkin Patch). The pace picks up and gradually Bogies drop out as they get sad, bored, or exhausted. In all, it is intended as a catharsis.

### **Animal Gods**

All of them are known by the moniker "Old". They really are old, too. Old. They've seen most of their fellows die and they are understandably cranky. They are obsessed with being dealt with in the old and proper ways which were forgotten a long time ago. Consequently, they are always quite angry and often times irrationally so. If placated by Bogies or extreme acts of Pagan propitiation, they can be reasonable to deal with, however. They even have blessings to bestow and wisdom as well. They avoid each other's company for they know that their life will likely end at the hand of their kin. There are no gatherings of Animal Gods and no customs for interaction amongst their kind. Any interaction they might have would be a replay of an earlier encounter, so whats the point, really? Animal Gods can't really recognize one Bogie from another or a Pagan from another Pagan. They can however tell the difference between a Bogie and a Pagan because Bogies smell different. Or so they say. A lot of them are liars.

Pagans have an odd relationship with the Animal Gods. Pagans divide their worship between the Sampo and the Cults of the Animal Gods. Pagans worship whatever Animal God they

encountered last, knowing that it is probably in the area and may come back. It makes sense because Pagans don't spend a lot of time tracking Animal Gods (Pwcks do most of that). When a new Animal God shows up, well then suddenly they are devotees of that particular Animal God's cult. And so on. Sometimes a particular village or household will encounter many Animal Gods in a short period. Other times, it might be half a generation before they adopt a new cult. It can be somewhat confusing switching religions halfway through your life by a matter of a chance meeting, but it happens. This is the lot of a Pagan.

### **Old Alligator**

Old Alligator has chomped more than a few Animal Gods into extinction and hes sent a few Bogies on the long trip to nowhere. Its a rite of passage to hit a gator on the snout and then get away. Pwcks consider it a sport. No sane Bogie would do this to Old Alligator, because he strikes faster than you can say "Swamp Mojo". The Cult of Old Alligator call themselves Alligator Warriors and wear alligator sheddings into battle (against who, we don't yet know). This is because Old Alligator's blessing is tough, gator-like skin. He likes hares and goats tethered near where he dwells, and this is the only sacrifice anyone knows he likes anymore.

### **Old Spider**

Old Spider is one of many trickster Animal Gods in the Fen. She likes to tell prophecy but tell it in such a way as to let the audience leap to conclusions. Inevitably, her wrath is not in ravaging a town's crops or its people, but rather, in telling a tale perfectly and making everyone take the wrong message away from it. Shes got some weird red thing on her belly that means "Don't kiss me" in whatever language Animal Gods write in. At least, that's what the Pwcks say. Her blessing is freedom from being shackled, bound, or otherwise stuck in a sticky situation.

### **Old Possum**

Old Possum is a trickster too, but he always pretends like he knows less than he does. He was born with a lie coming out of his throat. He hates the smell of Pagans and thinks Bogies are evil spirits. Hes been known to leave huge Animal God-size piles of possum scat on the porch of Pagans. Hes also been known carry off Pagan brats with its prehensile tail and raise them as his own, so that they smell "right". His blessing is the ability to play dead so well, no one even notices you are around. Old Possum likes to collect teeth, because his are all the same. That's a good offering for his cult, right?

### **Old Cottonmouth**

She likes the swamp better than the moors, but that doesn't stop her from being just as angry as any of them. You better be afraid of her bite because even though shes not so vicious as to hunt you down, if you happen upon whatever place she calls home, prepare for the worst. She has a great envy of hands, for she has none at all, and it is for this reason that the best way to appease her is to draw straws to determine who's the unlucky soul to stand behind her and act has her arms and hands. She loves the feeling that she can gesture to make her points and nothing makes her day more than throwing something or close-dancing with the boys. Shes mighty testy and if shes not happy with her arms, shes been known to bite them. Unfortunate. But, if you make her day, shes been known to give folks an egg that cures all poisons instantly.

### **Old Armadillo**

Old Armadillo likes to stick to dry land, but she'll swim if she has to. Don't bury any treasure anywhere, because trust me, she'll dig it up and make it her own. Shes really good at that. Treasures sometimes fall out from the space between her armor plates, because shes got so many goodies stuffed in there. Shes powerful ugly, but the best offering for her is to tell sweet lies about her charming features. Better hope you can lie, because if she sees through it, she'll

dig a hole in your chest. Her blessing makes you as hard to kill as she is and particularly skilled flatterers sometimes get a piece of her loot. Even chances that she'll try and marry you, though.

### **Old Snappy-Turtle**

Old Snappy-Turtle has a tongue that looks like whatever it is you desire, so if you happen upon the one thing you want most in the world sitting unoccupied and lonely in the middle of the Fen, don't walk up and grab it like some kind of halfwit. Its probably Old Snappy-Turtle trying to trick you into walking into his mouth. Did I mention hes really quite lazy? Hes not even willing to commit to proper methods of eating people. Still, he doesn't care if he smashes right through your house if its in the way of his path, so best to keep on his good side. How do you do that? You make a big heaping pot of stew and you leave it somewhere where he can see it. You have to make sure that it'll force him to change course if he wants some. Hes so lazy, he'll probably keep going in whatever direction you point him in. Snappy Turtle has a blessing, but he gives it out so rarely that no one knows what it is.

### **Old Swamp-Rat**

Old Swamp-Rat doesn't like anything that walks on two legs. He is a real stickler for the Old Ways the Tuatha used to propitiate him, but I don't know what those are. Do you? Old Swamp-Rat is very, very wise, but he is a trickster type and never speaks a word of truth. Seriously. Never a word. If he wants to tell you that he wants his left ear scratched, he'll probably say he wants his right ear scratched. In fact, he'll get powerful mad if you scratch his right ear, even though he asked for it. Old Swamp-Rat wants nothing more than secrets. Powerful, angsty, upsetting secrets, especially about other Animal Gods. If you really impress him with a particular secret, he might give you some of his wisdom without the lies. There's the rub, though; he'll never say hes telling the truth so you'll probably write it off as another lie. You'd be a fool to believe him and a fool not to believe him.

### **Old Crayfish**

Like I was saying before, Animal Gods are powerful old. Old Crayfish just might be the oldest of all of them and hes full of sadness. Hes so sad hes come all the way around to the other side to being totally pissed. The first and immediate thing to worry about are his claws, which he is perhaps overly fond of. His cult has been known to polish them for him and draw pictures on them of his various (possibly fictitious) exploits. He is, at his core, a thing of nostalgia although its unclear if the world he longs for ever really existed. If you are able to bring him around (no small task) hes been known to give blessings that break things as if he had snapped them in two using his own force. Did I say break? I meant destroy. Nothing survives his claws.

### **Old Crow**

In the really, really ancient times a cat mauled Old Crows wings and this has done precisely nothing for her disposition. If she sees you, and you don't have a way to calm her down, she can be expected to peck you into a pulp. Its not that shes mean, she just has this inward need to do to everyone else what the cat did to her wings. She remembers the old days and she had the vantage point to see it all. She knows more than anyone in the Fen, without a doubt. The trick is to give her something tasty. Like dead men's toes. That's her favorite, but she likes eyes too because those go bad real fast. The fresher, the better, really. She doesn't have a blessing to give, even if she felt like it. That part that gives out blessings must be in a cat's belly somewhere.

### **Old Mother Moth**

Everyone loves the Moth God because she doesn't bother a soul. She whispered the first words to the Bogies in ancient times. They learned writing by watching the interplay of pattern

on her wing-scales. Bogies take a lot of their customs from her and her children. They come out night and pitter-patter whisper at each other, just like the moths. Old Mother Moth likes it quiet, dark, and cool; the heat of the day doesn't suite her. She'll shush you like a librarian if you are causing a commotion. Shes not the kind to demand propitiation. She just wants everyone to grow up happy and strong.

### **Old Grasshopper**

Green-face Old Grasshopper is a pest. His eyes are always red and puffy and hes always kind-of sleepy. Just what have you been at, Grasshopper? Hes always barging into people's home and taking the food right off of their table. You'll see him going through a field of corn flinging empty cobs every which way. He doesn't mean to be a menace. Hes just a hungry bug. Still, if you let him do his thing, he can work his way through a whole crop in the time it takes you to say "Hey, get away from there, you hear?" The best way to propitiate the Grasshopper God is to make him a feast of his very own, but whats the point? Either way, hes eaten you out of house and home.

### **Old Anteater**

When you see a dredged up ball of hair with a long snoot coming your way, you better get up and go. That's because that snoot is attached to Old Anteater and his claws are sharper than his eyesight. He doesn't know friend from foe. Hell, he doesn't know ants from raisins. Consequently, most Pagans agree that its perfectly acceptable to lie to Old Anteater and offer him raisins instead of actual ants. It is said that he might also like back scratching, but this might be confusion; his blessing is transmitted only by allowing him to scratch your back with those big scary long claws he's got. If you've got Anteater's aid, you can crack your way into any structure and get into all kinds of trouble there.

### **Insect Societies**

They aren't exactly Animal Gods, but small colonies of strange insects build villages where they won't be disturbed. Sometimes a hollow tree will have a whole society of insects. They can talk too, but they are just so small you can't really hear them too well unless you have bigger ears than normal. They have professions. Houses. Stores. Aphid livestock. So be careful when knocking around the Swamp Moss on the oaks because there might be an insect city in there! Who could live with the tragedy of having destroyed an entire city just after they elected their first caterpillar mayor? They even made him an itty-bitty mayoral medallion. You should be ashamed.

The bugs are excellent craftsmen, it turns out, and shrewd in their business dealings. They will weave you some new britches in a jiffy. But rest assured, they'll be getting theirs. That's just how they operate. Given their size, I guess the world owes them something, right?

### **Pagan Society (and a few more tidbits about Bogies)**

Well, as I've said before, the Pagans don't come from the Blighted Fen. They even had a different name way back when. They've been assimilated into the Fen's story, of course, but they still hold some of their old tales. They tell stories of cities built into the boughs of great evergreens and of aggressive, predatory plants. The way they tell it, there wasn't any animals except the ones they kept alive. The damn plants were out to get them and their livestock. They kept it together though for a long while. Somewhere down the line they got the Sampo from their gods. No one really knows what happened to the gods, but I reckon that once you have a Sampo of your own, you don't really have much use for gods. The Sampo worked well, because they had a mighty civilization. Things turned bad for those Pagans and their Sampo,

though. Someone wanted those trees and that Sampo for their own and decided it was time to shut the whole thing down for good. Well, the Pagans weren't going to have any of it, so they fought. They fought for a while, but whatever it was that was ailing them so, it was stronger. When they couldn't fight any longer, they released a sacred doe and followed it to uncharted lands. They brought the Sampo so that its gifts would not be lost. We all know how that turned out.

### **Trade**

Pagans don't amass huge fortunes because there are no fortunes to be had in the Fen. A Pagan's idea of an investment is a goat. Their notion of labor extends to the acts of farming, crafting idols, and brewing. The Wise Ones trade carved chits amongst each other, each one redeemable for a favor by someone of that Wise One's village. Some Pagans find themselves in possession of too much wood of a certain type and notes that his neighbor has a different type of wood. Pagans recognize the wisdom in these two parties exchanging cords of wood. If you see that your buddy has a leech on his back, though, you reach over and you pull it off. You don't stand around and demand he give you a pail of milk for the privilege of a leech-free back.

### **Propitiation**

Pagans promised the Bogies to give them respect and tokens of acknowledgement. It is expected that when a Bogie visits a Pagan village, usually by night, that they get a goody as a reward for looking after their neighbor's interests. It is a sign of a settlement adhering to the old covenant. If they don't have a goodie, I see it as a warning sign that the Pagans aren't acting in good faith with the Bogies. If the Pagans can't offer a pancake or a sock, they are truly a sorry lot. Either they don't have it together or something is holding these people down. Either way, if a village doesn't have something to give then Bogies are under no compulsion to help the village. If a Bogie does help, it's one more good deed in their favor.

Bogies don't spend a lot of time at the tailor and they don't just don't have the materials on hand generally. Gifts of clothing are considered best. However, if a settlement is able to give gifts of food, this is also a good thing. Rustic artwork and handicrafts are a favorite. Some Bogies collect Pagan offerings and Weem have their own systems of categorising them.

### **Settled and Nomadic Pagans**

A Pagan is clearly a Pagan, which is to say, that a Pagan is not a Bogie or an Animal God or the Hut Witch. This distinction is necessary only because there are two lifestyles that Pagans adopt and they might seem like two different people in some ways. Some Pagans are homebodies who live and die in the same place as their parents. They are prone to acts of village building and something that passes for agriculture. At least, we'll count it as agriculture in this scholarly work. Don't ever say I'm not charitable. They grow rice and beans and sometimes corn when there are droughts. Pagans hope beyond all hopes for droughts so they can plant the dry-ground plants. Folks say droughts come about when the Queen's Handmaidens dry her eyes, but who knows what happens behind those white walls?

Other Pagans roam around in tents or with a simple backpack. This has its advantages. You can eat palmetto hearts while travelling around, so food isn't a terrible problem. You don't have to put up with Bogies and Animal Gods swooping in and demanding you give them gifts. You can see the world in its myriad soggy forms. You still have elders (they live with you) and you still have to dodge the occasional Animal God. Plus, you might step on a snake.

### **Wise Ones**

When a Pagan has seen somewhere between twenty and thirty years, they are given the designation of "Old Wise One". You'd think that there would be a lot of Pagans roaming around being called wise all their days. Really, there aren't that many. Pagans don't stick around that long. According to their legends, Pagans used to be immortal until some sort of fungus starting growing in their hearts. That can't be true, though, can it? I mean, Pagans don't even live in the same world anymore, so how could the fungus still be around? Either way, Pagans are lucky to see thirty years. Aside from just being happy to be around, Wise Ones get to make decisions for whatever settlement or nomad group they follow. When leadership is needed, the Wise Ones get together and hash out what's going to happen. If any Pagan has the patience for some Swamp Mojo, it's the Old Wise Ones. Sometimes, they'll seek out a Bogie and ask for advice. Presumably, because of their age, they would be possessed of a great wisdom. I'm not sure it exactly works out that way but it seems to keep Pagan culture afloat. Of course, if they step too far out of line a Redcap will eventually set them right. One way or another.

### **Mortality**

Pagans lives are writ upon the water. They don't get to go on ridiculous adventures like Bogies. No Pagan has ever tickled an Animal God and walked back into town again. Bogies do ignorant fun capers like this all the time. They don't have the weight of mortality on them like human beings do. To Bogie perceptions, they pass through the world quickly. They don't make attachments to Pagans in long term fashion for this reason. By the time they get to know somebody, they are stinking up the place. It's a problem. Pagans are always dying for one reason or another. Jorcob got taken by a swamp ape. Scyuzibella came down with the consumption. Hemmerson plowed his fields for damn near an hour after being decapitated in a farm accident. Bogies have to deal with this because Pagans never get comfortable with their lot in life. When people die in their lives, it reminds them of their mortality. When they cry, it is for themselves and everyone who shares their lot. The tears, you see, add up, and the Fen is already half drowned in them. It just can't handle too much sadness. So, Bogies come down out of the swamp and move among the people and cheer them up. They show that death isn't so sad: it is merely one adventure among many.

### **Pagan Physiology**

Pagans are human beings, it's true. They are considerably more physical than Bogies. Probably more "physical" than other human beings, too. If there is a Pagan who is smarter than the dumbest Weem, I've never met them. These are woodcutting people. They like their artwork rustic and their axes sharp. What was I talking about? Oh yes, physiology. There is one thing in particular that sets the Pagan people of the Blighted Fen apart from all human beings: they have a horribly lethal jungle fungus that grows in their damn heart. Now, Pagans are not a long lived people and I think you can see why. It's passed from mother to child, so there's really no avoiding it. It might even be contagious, but if it's so, it's strange the Bogies don't give a damn about it.

### **Threads**

Pagans wear simple cloths fit for agriculture and forestry. They wear tunics as often as overalls. Women don't go so fancy: they wear skirts or traveller's pants. Many Pagans wear leather or chain armor. Like much of Pagan and Bogie culture, the two have blended together into something distinct. Pagans often borrow styles and motifs from ancient Tuatha culture. Pagans make a majority of the clothes Bogies wear (except for those high fashion spider-webs the Weem wear). Consequently, Bogies have a ramshackle appearance. Pagans give them gaily dyed colors so they can be merry in their morbidity. Pagans make an effort to match socks but most have failed. I am of a mind that Bogies are supernaturally compelled to avoid proper pairing of socks.

## **Hewers**

Pagans don't sleep under the stars like Bogies. They like to build. And especially rebuild. Because Pagans have promised not to disturb the Fen's ecology too much, there is a whole way of life devoted to finding the choicest, strongest, most beautiful swamp trees for their lumber. Hewers are ax folk. Its their best friend and their livelihood. Pagans are poor, you know, so an ax is an investment. Now, its true that Hewers are rootless people. Loners, by and large. They see every inch of the Fen and sometimes they'll come into conflict over the most desirable lumber. Hewers are expected to plant trees as they travel and most of them do.

The Hewers have a sort of a subculture among their kind called the Dauntless. Dauntless use Great Axes, powerful and large. What separates a Dauntless Hewer from a normal Hewer is that the Dauntless don't run out of power. The more they chop, the more dangerous they become. Normal people don't really talk to Dauntless. They are just too scared. So when a Dauntless Hewer goes into a bar, they generally sit alone. They don't have too many friends. I guess everyone just assumes they are spoiling for a fight.

## **Pagan Metaphysics**

A few Old Wise Ones know a little Swamp Mojo, but most Pagans don't know squat about matters occult. Truth is, I don't think I do either. To the extent that Pagans could be said to worship anything, it would be the fading memory of their forest homeworld. Most of their rituals, though, involve propitiating the inhabitants of their new home. Pagans know what Bogies expect when they come a-knocking. They expect a confection or something to wear. The eternal question, then is which one? Cupcake or suspenders? Brownie or boot? Samoas or knickerbockers? These are the mysteries that Pagans aspire to understand. A very complicated binary.

Pagans associate eight different types of wood with the eight seasons (high and low) of the Blighted Fen. Surrounding yourself in the wood of one's birth season, under this line of reasoning, is said to be good luck. Well, I don't know what these woods are (Oak? Teak? Cherry? Pine?) and I reckon the Pagans of the various regions don't even agree on a standard. Some Pagans don't even know such a custom exists.

## **The Hut Witch**

Well, shes not even a Pagan, but I'm gonna talk about her now because it seems to me she has more in common with Pagans than with Bogies. She can do what she wants with Pagans, and consequently, they seek her out and she dwells where she know she will be found. Pagans are forbidden to call upon her by their Elders, but shes the only one who can do certain things. Bogies and some talented Pagans know the secrets of Swamp Mojo, but its limited. The Hut Witch is a sorceress; she does Black Magic. She calls upon a retinue of familiars which she suckles upon her Witch's Teat, whatever the hell that is. Shes made pacts with so many monsters and devils that shes forgotten their names. Shes a cannibal and, I hear, a prostitute. That is to say, she gives of her powers to those who can pay her for it. Now, what do you pay a conjurer for their services? After all, anything they want, they could presumably just poof into existence, right? Well, I hear she likes fresh bodies. That's right. She likes to boil them in her giant iron pot. So when a Redcap hears that there are murders in an area where the Hut Witch is, they'll try and intercept the culprit outside her Hut. "What services are worth killing for?" you might hypothetically ask. Well, she has a host of magical, alchemical, and gerontological knowledge. She can lend you her familiars; each one has a power of its own. She can make an infertile couple expecting child. I hear she can enchant a person so that they are always happy no matter what sorry state they are in. That's a mighty tempting proposition, I must say.

That Old Hut Witch also has a hutfull of assorted magical crap. Shes got a bone that'll make the blind see. Shes got a mummified ape hand that grants wishes. Shes got a magical splinter that once slew a giant. Shes even got a bag of magic salt that exorcises the dead. Well, she did have it, once. It was stolen by some intrepid Pagans, probably with some help from the old Mojo.

## **Places of Note in the Blighted Fen**

### **The Crossroads**

Picture this: you happen to be taking a stroll at midnight when you look up and notice that you are standing smack-dab in the middle of a crossroads. A sign points to there having been names for these two roads, but they've been worn away by rain and neglect. There are gallows at each of the corners, facing perpendicular to the road. Glowing eyes peer out of the woods. Just possums, right? Sure. But you need to know one thing, mister. There is only one crossroads in all of the Fen. It loops back in on itself eternally, a sign of ill omen stretched out into infinity. That has a ghostly kind of poetry to it, doesn't it? Well, that's the magic of the Crossroads. Redcaps with a vocabulary underneath their chapeau might describe it as being a metaphor for their nature. That's probably why the Redcaps are very, very protective of it. They share some kinship with the place. They both seem to have the same sort of blues about them. The Redcaps have such a close connection to the place that the closest among them can call upon some seriously powerful Mojo and wrap themselves and their allies in a thin dusting of raw nightmare. Can you stop a nightmare? Of course not. If they don't make you flee in terror, I'd recommend fleeing for reasons of self preservation. Of course, they've never had to do this. One hopes they never do.

### **The Pumpkin Patch**

Somewhere behind the Lillypad Lake and beyond the Colossal Cypress Knees lies the Pumpkin Patch. Weem gardeners created the place to grow massive orange gourds. Secondarily, it serves as the single largest Heydegy circle in all of the Fen. There are very few people with enough Mojo floating around in their guts to fill it in fact. If a Pagan settlement is in need of food, they let the strongest Pagan in that settlement come and claim the heaviest pumpkin they are capable of transporting back home. Some villages have designated "pumpkin bearers" whose strength training keeps their people's belly's full. The Weem nominally run the Pumpkin Patch, but really, its a place to go to do the sorts of thing Weem like to do. You know, things like trading secrets, hiding behind giant pumpkins, and talking about obscure things. The Weem say that the blue, glowing eyes that peer out from underneath the tangle of vines are just glow worms, but I'm not entirely convinced.

### **The Rushes**

If you aren't from the swamp, you might not know what a 'rush' is. Its a kind of a boggy plant with a hollow stem that fills up with gooey swamp muck. It just so happens that the Fen has a place completely grown over with them and this is where the Pwck like to gather and swim about. Its cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Legend says there are pots of Tuatha gold sunk at the bottom of the Rushes and everyone wants to get at it. But, you can't swim the root gnarl of the waterplants, so no one has found so much as a doubloon. Still, its a fun pastime to try.

### **The Mausoleum**

There is only one hill in all of the Fen. It rises a glorious emerald green from the brown muck of the swamp. Mishappen and eroded standing stones spiral their way out of the swamp towards the Mausoleum which resides atop the nameless hill. The Mausoleum had once

been a palace but its ornaments were chiseled away by order of the Tuatha Queen. Its towers were dismantled. The stones were used to make the two nameless roads that meet at the Crossroads. The windows of the palace still remain, but don't go thinking that you'll catch a glimpse of what's inside. You won't. The windows gush forth massive quantities of brine, the very tears of the Queen. We know that the King is interred within, mourned in eternal vigil by the Queen. It doesn't really seem fair, does it?

### **The Witch's Hut**

You never know where the Witch's Hut will turn up. If you stick around in the Fen for a while you'll probably catch a glimpse. I bet you probably guessed that it has chicken feet. Great big ones. Taller than highest Pagan who ever lived. She often struts her Hut all across the Fen in the span of a day. She meets a lot of folks along the way, too. The Tuatha made deals with the Witch to protect her from the Animal Gods and Bogies have kept the bargain in good faith. Of course, no Bogie in their right mind would go near the Hut Witch. She's got those secret taboos and that black magic. Of course, you have to wonder some things. How exactly do the Bogies keep the Animal Gods away from her if they don't know where she is going to be? Hard to say, but I reckon that she has to know some very clever Bogies she communicates with. They would have to be incredibly brave to have figured out the secret taboos that makes her go crazy and eat you. What if she has Bogies in her employment in that old Hut? What a spooky thought.

### **Liverymeet**

The largest of all Pagan settlements is Liverymeet, where Pagans barter with one another for various tools of agriculture. Some trade seed and some trade animals. You can find tools, pretty trinkets, and underwear in Livermeet so really it's the place to be if you are a Pagan. If you've got access to any kind of undergarment, that's a very significant status symbol.

## **An Out of Play Discussion of the Blighted Fen**

### **Sadness**

As a roleplaying challenge, Bogies can get so negative and messed up inside they become NPCs. The idea is that Bogies are certainly dark, but they cannot neglect their fairy nature or else it withers away, leaving only their wraithly aspect (which is bad news, incidentally). As an example, a Redcap Executioner concept would not be overly morbid, especially if it was used as a ruse to intimidate, rather than to actually kill. However, if this character really did start taking glee in executions and seeking them out for the purpose of satisfying their morbidity they could very well slip into Willowsip territory. It is unlikely Bogie characters will allow their cousins to fall to their darker nature. Your peers should reign you in long beforehand. Of course, if it is your character's fate to fall to their dead nature, you'll be made into an antagonist. This means that the game staff will dictate when and how the character is played thereafter; they are an NPC antagonist.

### **Arriving in the Fracture**

What the setting packet indicates is true; sometimes the Blighted Fen will pull a Pagan or Bogie under the water and deposit them, dry as a bone, in an entirely different place altogether. Characters will likely have heard of this phenomenon before, but obviously, never previously experienced it themselves. Bogies who appear particularly zombie-like may illicit attention from survivors of various undead apocalypses; be prepared with a well timed Feat of Charisma or public display of whimsy.

### **Five Things Every Bogie Knows**

Every Bogie from the Blighted Fen knows...

*...what type of Bogie they are.*

Bogies come in different flavors: shadowy night fey (Weem), mischievous wanderers (Pwck), and grim ghosts (Redcaps). Bogies tend towards these lifestyles, but there are oddballs who march to their own beat. No Bogie is a stereotype, though.

*...their personal customs and strange prohibitions.*

Bogies are chaotic and while they might fall along different lifestyles, every Bogie has a unique set of customs all their own. They might avoid stepping on cracks or eat only spicy food. They might wear their clothes inside out or it might be that they have to tell the truth to anyone who steals a certain feather. No two Bogies have the same set of customs, nor do all Bogies make their secret ways known to the world (some do).

*...that immortality is an illusion.*

Pagans think of Bogies as being immortal, but Bogies know that they are not. The greatest of their kind was first to succumb to death and it has traumatized Bogie culture ever since. When a Bogie has been destroyed so many times they lose their fairy nature, they become a malevolent ghost (A Willowisp), who does not return once exorcised.

*...sadness is the greatest threat to Bogie and Fen.*

Everyone in the Fen seems to feel that the best days are behind them, and this hopelessness is deadly to Bogies. If a Bogie forgets their whimsical, chaotic side, they begin to turn into malicious ghosts. This is “death” to a Bogie. While Bogies enjoy imagery of death and depression, they cannot succumb to it in action or word. To do so is to face ultimate unmaking.

*...the covenants sealed with the various inhabitants of the Fen.*

The Bogies placate and protect the Animal Gods from their own madness and rage, as has been the case for a long time. The Bogies leave the Hut Witch alone because she can eat a Bogie if they break one of her three secret taboos. Bogies are required to render aid to Pagan communities who present them with a bit of clothing or something tasty (as long as its offered, Bogies can refuse the gift).

## **Five Things Every Pagan Knows**

Every Pagan from the Blighted Fen knows...

*...that they originated not in the Fen, but the Forest Primaeval.*

Pagans are descendants of a warrior people from a far off land, a mythic land of trees. They are refugees living on foreign soil. Consequently, Pagans pay tribute to the local inhabitants: Bogies and the Animal Gods. Pagans feel the nostalgia of exile most acutely.

*...which Animal God their settlement/tribe encountered most recently.*

Pagans follow the ways of whichever Animal God they last met, because they are the mostly likely one to be seen next. Because of this, Pagans change cults frequently, including to Animal Gods whose ways are entirely unknown (they make something up).

*...the folksiest way to accomplish any given task.*

Pagans don't have much, but they have survivalist wisdom. Their culture is a rich folk tradition of agriculture and wilderness know-how. Sadly, Pagans do not have rich traditions of metaphysics, science, or performance art, but many think they do. Consequently, Pagan sagacity is hit-or-miss. Employ their methods at your peril.

*...the ways to propitiate Bogies.*

Bogies are obligated to protect Pagan settlements from Animal Gods, Willowisps, and overzealous Redcaps provided that the settlement can offer a token of thanks to that Bogie. This gift usually takes the form of a small confection or a piece of clothing. Frequently, Bogies will not claim the gift if they think that Pagans need it more; the process can just be ceremonial.

*...to respect the natural world and all people.*

Pagans, after little culture shock, eventually came to an accord with the denizens of the Fen. They agreed to replant any tree cut down and to thank the Animal God, alive or otherwise, of any beast they kill. Pagans have also been taught to respect the humanity (or equivalent) of sentient beings. Just because a person (Bogie or whatever) looks strange, it doesn't mean they are a threat.

## Influences

*Robert Johnson (Music)*

The original blues man. Hot tamales!

*La Tribu de Dana (Music)*

Cheesy "one hit wonder" french-language rap group Manau had only one (possibly two) good songs. The best one was about the last survivor of a slaughtered Celtic tribe (The Tribe of Dana; a Tuatha) and his wanderings of profound sadness.

*Peter Pan (Literature)*

Bogies are very much like the Lost Boys, getting into all sorts of adventures without any other intentions. Good inspiration for both Bogie and Pagan duds.

*Aesop's Fables (Literature)*

They aren't exactly Gods, but they are the most iconic animal tales.

*The Films of Tim Burton*

For overall look and feel of this setting, I would use the films of Tim Burton as a good guideline. I see the Mausoleum's Hill in the Fen being very much like the moors of *Sleepy Hollow*. The Mausoleum and Pumpkin Patch would be something out of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Hell, *Beetlejuice* himself is pretty much the very image of a Willowisp; primal, morbid, silly, and perpetually looking for a way to materialize in the physical world to cause mortal mischief.

*Invader Zim (Television Series)*

Both horrifying and hilarious. Humans (who are all very Pagan-like) are entirely oblivious to the various plots to destroy the planet. Ms. Bitters (Zim's teacher) is explicitly a fairy creature who lost all hope and became a horrifying shadow-thing.