



Eldritch Flora

Researched & Published by
the Reverend Alfred Purefoy

Eldritch Flora

© 2013 by DRAKAT Games. All rights reserved.

This edition revised 2016.

Published by DRAKAT Games.



DRAKAT Games

Eldritch Flora is a resource aimed at the Keeper who wants to send their players to a region so dire that the very vegetation is tainted with the horrors of the Cthulhu Mythos. The intended setting is **Darkisle**, DRAKAT Games' fictional British island, but the plants described in this book will work in most temperate climates. Obviously, the resource is written with *Call of Cthulhu* in mind, but you could maybe find a use for these plants in a fantasy setting, or even on an alien planet.

Eldritch Flora takes the form of a pamphlet written shortly after the Great War by the keen amateur natural historian Reverend Alfred Purefoy. Purefoy made several trips to the island and published a number of treatises on what he found. On 1st November 1923 he disappeared during one such visit, never to be seen again... just like his hero, the pioneering naturalist Dr Edward Palmer.

There are no game stats or references to Darkisle in the plant descriptions, allowing you to give them out as a resource no matter what the setting. Instead, a separate '*Notes for the Keeper/GM*' section at the end of the resource gives some ideas of how you may want to use these plants in an RPG context, with particular reference to *Call of Cthulhu* rules.

Contents

Introduction

Feverdream

Mawe Moss

Snareweed

Scrywort

Thunstanberry

Notes for the Keeper/GM

All images are in the public domain from www.vintageprintable.com

***Call of Cthulhu* is a trademark of Chaosium Inc. and used with permission**

Feverdream (*Bellis hypnosii*)

History & nomenclature

Feverdream was first identified by Dr Edward Palmer, who tentatively placed the plant in the genus *Trientalis*. However, specimens returned by the author showed the flower to be composed of bracts surrounding a pseudanthia, a characteristic of the *Asteracea* family. While there is still some dispute as to its classification, for now the feverdream is regarded as member of the *Bellis* genus and thus related to the Common Daisy. The species name of *B. hypnosii* derives from its reputation for causing drowsiness. Local folklore goes further, claiming the scent of the flower causes a troubled sleep haunted by vivid dreams that are invariably of a disturbing nature. This explains the plant's common name, and why it is generally shunned. Some credulous souls, however, cultivate it as a house plant, claiming the reveries it causes give them rare mystical insights.



Description

Feverdream is an herbaceous perennial plant. It grows to a height of some five inches, with obovate leaves arranged in pairs. The plant appears in late March or April and flowers from midsummer until early September. The flower comprises a small central disc of yellow florets ringed by larger orange florets. Six pale blue bracts (thought by the layman to be the petals) form a star shape. The plant goes to seed in September, but reproduction is, it would appear, most commonly achieved by propagation from rhizomes that extend underground from each plant. Both rhizomes and above-ground parts of the plant die back with the first frosts, the plant forming overwintering tubers that survive underground.

Habitat

Feverdream is most commonly found in woodland, preferring as it does shade and well-drained organic soils. The plant's preferred method of propagation results in colonies of identical specimens.

Notes

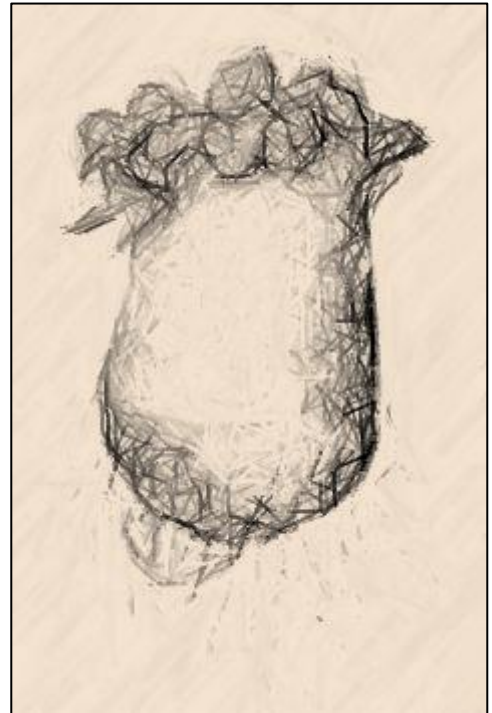
Feverdream is regarded with some caution in the district, entirely due to the reputation of the flower's scent. It is indeed a curiously heady perfume, quite without comparison in the experience of the author. Unlike other flowers of the genus, the bracts remain open at night, and if anything the flower's scent would seem to be accentuated during the hours of darkness.

The flower's soporific qualities are not used for medicinal purposes as it is said to bring only a restless sleep, haunted by terrible dreams. Local superstition has it that some have awoken from such dreams much changed, to the point of lunacy. Despite this, a few individuals are said to seek feverdream out, claiming it provides them with some form of communion to a "spirit world".

Mawe Moss (*existence disputed*)

History & nomenclature

The most complete description of this organism comes from Dr Edward Palmer. During the course of his studies in the area, Dr Palmer was warned that certain moorland hollows were filled great quantities of a sponge-like moss termed mawe moss, and that the unwary may fall into such hollows and drown in the rainwater trapped therein. By chance, a landslip during one visit uncovered the true nature of this plant, allowing Dr Palmer to extract an example and examine it in detail. His description told of a remarkable organism. Unable to return a specimen for corroboration, his reports were not, however, sufficient for the scientific community. Thus no official classification exists for this plant. The common name of mawe moss is thought by most to be a corruption of the word "moor", though the author shares Dr Palmer's fears that it holds more sinister connotations.



Description

Mawe moss is commonly taken to be, quite simply, a variety of sphagnum moss found in upland peat bogs. As with all sphagnum, this moss is an efficient moisture trap. Mawe moss is said to have a habit of growing as a deep, sponge-like mass. In fact, this mossy growth (shown in close detail in the lower diagram) is but one aspect of the plant. Rather than simply a multitude of mosses filling some chance hollow in the ground, the plant is in truth shaped like an enormous sack. It grows down into soft, boggy ground, attaining a depth of some ten feet. The outer sheath is exceptionally tough and fibrous: within it resides the bulk of the mossy growth, which also covers large, flap-like leaves that conceal the open top of the sack.



Habitat

The plant is extremely rare, confined to a few boggy areas dotted among moorland.

Notes

Mawe moss is not truly a moss – or possibly, it is part of some symbiotic relationship between a moss and a quite unique plant than can only be likened to an outside, subterranean pitcher plant. The upper diagram is a reproduction of Dr Palmer's sketch of the unearthed specimen (which was, alas, burned by persons unknown before it could be shipped for further study). Even brief contact with mawe moss can result in a rash: it appears that the mossy parts of the plant are covered in some sort of coating that is quite acidic in nature. It is hard to avoid concurring with Dr Palmer's suggestion that the plant's name may refer to it resembling the maw (stomach) of some great beast. For within the specimen he examined he found the skeletons of dogs, foxes, sheep – and a human.

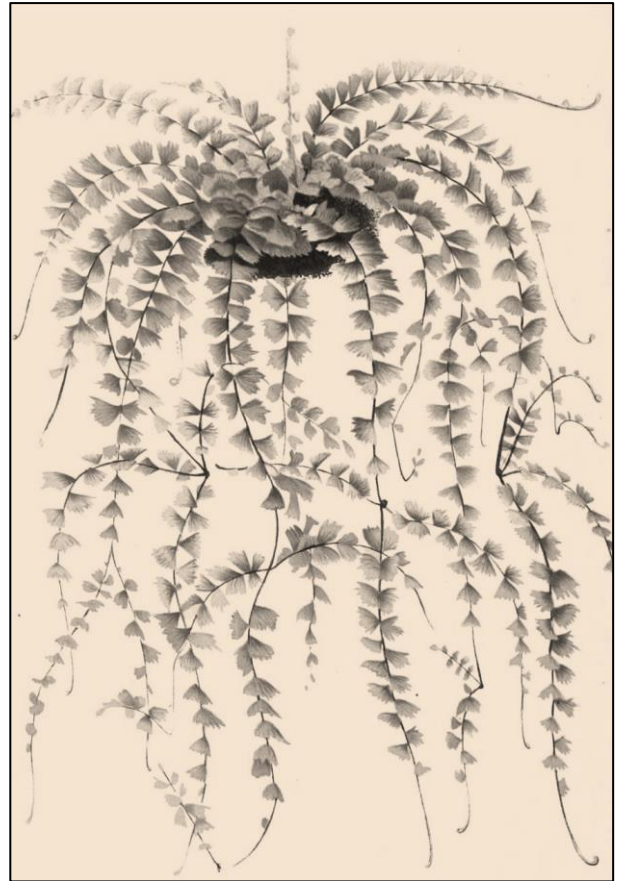
Snareweed (*Adiantum hephestum*)

History & nomenclature

Snareweed has been much-remarked upon by visitors to the region, such is the startling nature of its ability to move rapidly. Several examples have been retrieved for study, confirming that the plant is a species of maidenhair fern unique to these parts.

Description

Snareweed is a trailing fern with fan-shaped leaves. Fronds grow up to a length of a yard. The plant grows from a creeping rhizome, first appearing in early May and dying back with the first frost of autumn. Snareweed typically grows in dense clumps. Its most notable feature is its ability to rapidly constrict: when a frond is touched, it quickly contracts with a spiralling motion seemingly designed to entrap the transgressor. The strength of this constriction increases with the age of the plant: in the spring it is but feeble, but by the end of summer it is quite severe, enough to trouble a grown man.



Habitat

Snareweed grows in moist, alkaline soils, and prefers shade. It can grow either spreading across the ground or as a trailing plant on steep – or even vertical – surfaces.

Notes

While plants that display the ability to effect rapid movement are not unheard of, they are most uncommon and always worthy of note (one thinks of the venus flytrap, *Dionaea muscipula*, or the touch-me-not, *Mimosa pudica*). Snareweed is such a plant, its fronds sensitive to touch (rather like *Mimosa pudica*) and responding with a spiralling constriction that often grasps the transgressor. The evolutionary purpose for this is unclear, though it may relate to the need to disperse the spores, which are rather firmly attached and do not scatter readily: by constricting around passing fauna, which then tears the fronds loose and moves away, the distribution of the plant is enhanced. However, as noted above, as the plants attain greater maturity both the strength of the fronds and the severity of the constriction increases until tearing loose becomes exceedingly difficult.

Snareweed is viewed with some antipathy by the local populace. Sheep farmers are most especially averse to it, for it is not uncommon for a wandering sheep to become hopelessly entangled by snareweed, and die either from starvation or asphyxia. Where the plant encroaches on their lands (usually at the edge of woodland, in hedgerows or spilling down from rocky outcrops), farmers will often clear the fern with hand scythes during June, the fronds becoming fuel for Midsummer Eve bonfires. Stories abound of people killed by the plant, having been tripped among a mature clump and having fronds then constrict about their neck. Locals advise laying still in such circumstances and hoping that help arrives.

Scrywort (*Lychnis flos-coculi delphus* - disputed)

History & nomenclature

To all intents, scrywort is indistinguishable from the common weed Ragged Robin (*Lychnis flos-coculi*). However, in the 1811 pamphlet *Natural Curiosities of Ill-Favoured Parts*, Dr Edward Palmer reported properties of scrywort that were quite unlike those of the Ragged Robin. Believing that he had identified a separate subspecies, Dr Palmer proposed the name *L. flos-coculi delphus*, taking the subspecies identifier from the legendary oracle at Delphi. In this he reflected the folklore that claims divinatory properties of the plant. This also explains its common name, "scry" meaning to look into the future. Unfortunately the dried specimens returned did not display any unusual properties, and a later shipment of living specimens was lost to fire. Thus the existence of this subspecies is still in dispute.

Description

Scrywort is physically indistinguishable from Ragged Robin. It is an herbaceous perennial that blooms from late May to August. The plant's lower leaves are spoon-shaped and on stalks, forming a rosette on the ground. From this the flower-bearing stalks grow to a height of a yard, with the higher leaves lanceolate with a pointed apex. The stalks are covered in downward-angled hairs, making them rough to the touch. The pink flowers comprise five petals, each divided into four lobes, giving the flower its ragged appearance. The fruit develops in late August, taking the form of ¼ inch capsules containing many seeds. After the seeds are distributed, scrywort dies back during September, the plant's rhizome overwintering below the ground.



Habitat

Scrywort grows in the open, preferring light, damp soils. It is often found in meadows and alongside roads and pathways.

Notes

As with Ragged Robin, scrywort is an unremarkable wildflower in appearance. What makes it unusual are its properties when used in herbalism. Local practitioners claim that, when prepared properly, a potion made from the plant can be used to give the drinker a glimpse of the future, though at some risk to their own mental wellbeing. The chief component of this potion appears to be whole scrywort plants, plucked "after flowering and before going to seed". The precise quantities to be used are a jealously guarded secret, and the curious amateur should not experiment, for too high a dosage is poisonous and may prove fatal.

While belief in divination is superstitious nonsense, it would seem that scrywort does indeed have some narcotic properties, perhaps similar in nature to opiates. Upon exiting their drugged states, imbibers seem to interpret their experiences while in a stupor as having seen glimpses of the future. Unfortunately, this folly carries risks, with habitual users of the potion renowned for developing strange behaviours that culminate in lunacy.

Thunstanberry (*unclassified*)

History & nomenclature

The thunstanberry is not recorded until the late 18th Century, when it is mentioned as being the only plant to thrive on Thunstan Heath. This heath is itself something of a mystery: it appears on no early maps of the region, first being noted in Crawford's map of 1792. Thus both the heath and the plant named after it seem to be relatively recent. While there is no rational explanation as to how thunstanberry came to the area, wild stories abound. No specimens of the plant have been returned for detailed study, meaning it remains unclassified. From its appearance, it would appear to be of the genus *Solanum* and thus related to the nightshade, but this is merely a speculative suggestion.

Description

Thunstanberry is a large annual plant. It first appears in late April, growing rapidly to a height of some four feet. The stem is rigid and covered with hairs. Leaf stalks grow from it in pairs, bearing compound pinnate leaves with ragged edges, also covered in hairs. The flowers bloom continuously from June to September, appearing in clusters on their own stems. The flowers are small (typically ½ inch across) and a grey-blue colour. They comprise eight petals arranged in a star around a central column formed by fused anthers. The flowers turn to fruit after about a fortnight. The fruit is of the form of a green berry some two inches across, which ripens to a deep red colour after a week or so. The berry is edible but flavourless. The plant withers and dies with the first frost of autumn, decaying rapidly to a grey dust.

The most remarkable aspect of the thunstanberry is its appearance at night, when it emits a faint grey glow, due perhaps to some kind of natural phosphorescence.

Habitat

Thunstanberry is found only on Thunstan Heath. According to local testimony, its range increases a little with each passing year.

Notes

Thunstanberry is a most singular plant, curious in both appearance and history. Local folklore asserts that Thunstan Heath formed from the blasted ground that resulted when a shooting star fell to earth. Surrounding flora first thrived with unnatural vigour, then died and crumbled to dust. It was then that thunstanberry was noted, a new plant that came to be the only one that grew on the heath. As might be expected from such superstition, the berry is shunned by the local populace, who claim those few foolhardy enough to feast upon it become mad before succumbing to some terrible but unspecified fate. Efforts to recover a specimen have to date been in vain, for on removal from the ground it dies within the hour, crumbling completely into a most peculiar grey dust.



Notes for the Keeper/GM

All of these can be used simply as new types of plant with attached folklore to help give a unique feel to an isolated region. However, it will be much more fun if you choose to regard that folklore as true, allowing these plants to be linked to the Cthulhu Mythos (or whatever supernatural activity your game allows if using these with rules other than *Call of Cthulhu*).

Feverdream

The heady scent of flowering feverdream can lull an unsuspecting character to sleep if they pause to rest beside a clump. To see if this happens using *Call of Cthulhu 7th Edition* rules, make an opposed POW roll, assuming the plant's scent to have a POW of 40. If the roll character loses, they fall asleep. For older versions of the rules, the character must test their POW against that of the plant on the Resistance Table, with the plant's POW being 8.

If you use the supplemental Dreamland rules, a feverdream-induced sleep will send the character's consciousness directly to the Dreamland world. Otherwise, you might want to simply have the character awoken some hours later, mentally exhausted after strange and terrible dreams. Have them make a SAN roll – failing it means these dreams cost them D4 Sanity Points. If a Mythos-related problem was on the character's mind when they fell asleep, you may choose to give them a chance to learn some insight into it from their dream.

Mawe Moss

Not necessarily a Mythos-related plant, but a pretty unpleasant one all the same. The mawe moss supplements the meagre nutrients in a peat bog by trapping and digesting animals or people. The top of the plant is disguised as a patch of rich, velvety moss. In fact it comprises large, flap-like leaves that, when stepped on, will give way, allowing the victim to fall into the deep, moss-filled sack below. This sack is tough and smooth-sided: a character will get a chance to clamber out, needing to make a Hard Climb roll (older rules: roll half the Climb skill or better) to succeed. If this fails, the character is trapped inside the plant for at least the next round.

Normally, the sack will be saturated with water – the character is at risk of drowning:

Call of Cthulhu 7e rules: each round the character is trapped in the sack they must make a Swim roll. If they fail, they suffer D6 damage from inhaling water. If they make a Regular Swim roll they keep their head above water: if they make a Hard Swim roll they earn another chance to climb out. Again, they need to make a Hard Climb roll to succeed: if they fail they fall back, and must repeat the process the next round.

Older Call of Cthulhu rules: as above. The character must make a Swim roll to avoid drowning damage, with a roll of half Swim skill or less earning another chance to climb out.

Of course, the character may be helped out of the plant if friends are on hand.

Drowning might be preferable to the other option: in a spell of dry weather the sack will only be partly filled, meaning a person can keep their head above the level of the water. Unfortunately this means that the acidic ooze secreted by the moss will have time to start dissolving them alive: they will lose 1 HP per hour until they finally die in agony, unless rescued. Once dissolved, the nutrients from the victim's body are absorbed by the plant.

The mawe moss is large and tough: it can take 12 + 2D6 HP damage before being destroyed.

Snareweed

Again not specifically a Mythos-related plant, but one that can give characters a scare, and maybe worse. In spring snareweed will be nothing more than an interesting diversion, causing some amusement as it weakly coils around a character's ankle. However as the summer progresses the plant gets stronger.

Call of Cthulhu 7e rules

Snareweed gains five points of STR every two weeks (assume it starts growing at the start of May). Should a character stumble into a plot of snareweed, they will need to make an opposed STR roll testing their strength against the strength of the snareweed. If they succeed they will tear themselves free, if not they are held fast, and might trip.

A snared character must make a Dodge roll: if they fail they trip and fall into the snareweed bed. In either case they get one last chance to free themselves. If they did not trip, they must make a further opposed STR roll against the plant. If they succeed, they slowly manage to tear themselves free: if they fail, they are held fast, but at least remain on their feet.

If a character trips, they must make two opposed STR rolls. If they succeed with the first they manage to drag themselves upright: if they succeed with the second they tear free, as above.

If a tripped character fails the first roll, the snareweed binds them tightly in place where they lie. Further, there is a 25% chance that a frond tangles around their neck. If this happens, the character should be asked what they do: if their first instinct is to struggle, the frond will tighten and strangle them. If they lie still they will be safe.

If a character is able to keep a hand free and has a knife, they may be able to cut themselves free. Otherwise they must wait D6 hours for the fronds to loosen and then try to move away very slowly (the severity of the constriction is proportional to how firmly the plant is touched). The only other possibility is to sit tight and wait for rescue.

Older Call of Cthulhu rules

When using older editions, the plant gains 1 point of STR every two weeks. Use the same sequence of rolls as above, but have the character check their STR against the snareweed on the Resistance Table.

Mature snareweed can easily trap and possibly kill an unlucky or unwary character – at the very least, the plant could slow down an escape, forcing fleeing characters to run in slow-motion, feet constantly dragged at by the constricting fronds.

If you want to lighten your gaming session with a bad pun, you could mention that snareweed often grows among wood anemones. These are pretty flowers, but locals won't risk picking them because of the snareweed. After all, with fronds like those, who needs anemones? Sorry.

Scrywort

To get the full gaming potential from this plant, it should be assumed that it can indeed be used to give glimpses of the future. The potion's recipe should be closely guarded by those who know it, meaning a character will have to work hard to get it. One suggestion for such a recipe might be:

- Take thirteen scrywort – the entire above-ground part of the plant, which must be bearing flowers but not seeds.
- Chop the plants finely and add a little boiling water. Mash to a paste with pestle and mortar.
- Add a pinch of salt, 24 fern spores, one pint of sour milk and a quart of cold water. Stir together thoroughly.
- Place on heat and allow to simmer until just half a pint remains. Stir frequently during this process.

- Let the potion cool.
- The potion must be drunk in one go that same day (and will taste foul). The drinker must remain in a darkened room for the potion to work.

Skipping any of the ingredients will cause the potion to fail, as will using too few scrywort or not simmering for long enough. Using too many scrywort or simmering the potion down to anything less than half a pint of liquid will result in too concentrated a dose: this will act as a poison. If using *Call of Cthulhu 7th Edition* rules, treat this as a Strong Poison: the victim suffers 2D10 HP damage, halved if a Hard CON roll is made. Damage may be reduced further – at the Keeper’s discretion – if a successful First Aid roll is made, and negated entirely by a successful Medicine roll.

If using older versions of the rules, treat it as a poison of Potency 12. Make a resistance roll against the CON of the character – if the character succeeds the spell fails but leaves them with nothing worse than a stomach ache. If they fail, they are poisoned, and suffer 12 HP damage in the D20 minutes’ time, unless treated with a successful Treat Poison roll.

If the potion is prepared correctly, the drinker will go into a trance-like state for about five minutes, with pupils dilated. During this time the GM may allow them to see visions of things that have not yet happened (the clarity of these visions, and whether the events seen are fixed or can be altered, is up to the Keeper). If anything of a Mythos nature is viewed, the character must make the appropriate SAN roll or else lose Sanity Points.

Thunstanberry

Thunstanberry is inspired by the HP Lovecraft story *The Colour out of Space*. Thunstan Heath was indeed created by the impact of a meteorite in the 18th Century. On impact it shattered. Some parts of it were hard and metallic: these seemed to attract lightning strikes during storms and became known as “thunderstones”. The heath took on a corrupted form of this name. The remainder of the meteorite was made up of a strange rock that shrank away to nothing, releasing an unworldly colour (for want of a better word) that soaked into the ground. That year the vegetation around the site grew wild before twisting into distorted mutations and dying. Next spring, new plants not seen before were found sprouting from where the colour had leached into the soil. In time these came to be called thunstanberries.

The berries of the plant look tempting, but are flavourless. All the same, the occasional rash person has sampled them in the past. This tends not to end well.

Call of Cthulhu 7e rules

Should a character try a berry, have them make a POW roll. If they fail then they have become inexplicably addicted to them, and will feel the need to eat at least one berry a day. If they are prevented from doing so they will develop a fever and feel that their life is endangered by not eating the berries. If kept from the berries, then after 3D4 days of this “cold turkey” they will be fine, and cured of their addiction.

Characters that keep eating the berries are in grave danger, for they are infused with the Colour, which is in fact an alien intelligence. From the third day onwards, each day that a berry is eaten, the person must make a SAN roll. If this is failed, they lose 10 Sanity Points and become paranoid. They will believe that the berries are giving them secret insights into people’s true intentions and keeping them safe from some malevolent force that is corrupting the minds of all around them. They will become convinced that they are surrounded by enemies who are intent on murder, and that they need to protect themselves.

Recovery from the berries is still possible (though this will not return the lost Sanity Points), so long as the victim is prevented from eating any more (as per the cold turkey described above). If they DO

keep eating them, then for each day after the one in which the victim went mad, have them make a CON roll. If this roll is failed, their body is overwhelmed by the Colour: they will warp into a monstrous, twisted, grey parody of a human, their CON, STR and SIZ doubling, along with their Hit Points. They will attack any human they see with their bare hands. They are now beyond help. Any person that witnesses this needs to make a SAN roll. Failing it will cost D10 Sanity Points, with 1 Sanity Point being lost even if it is succeeded.

If not killed in combat, the creature will survive for D6 hours in this state before dying. Upon death, it will crumble into a grey dust, from which will bleed an indescribable colour that will soak into the ground. Next spring, a thunstanberry plant will grow there.

While it will be easiest to play out this scenario with an NPC, with sufficient skill a Keeper could work it so that an affected player character fails to realise what is truly happening. By making secret rolls on the character's behalf and making them think that the rest of the party are truly turning against them, the Keeper can create a scenario where the victim, if they are to be saved, must be helped against their will.

Older Call of Cthulhu rules

When using older editions, the same events occur as described above. The initial check for addiction after eating a berry is made by rolling equal to (or less than) 5 x POW using percentage dice. A higher roll means the character is addicted. Similarly, the check for the final transformation is made by rolling percentage dice against 5 x CON: if the roll exceeds this, the character is transformed.



DRAKAT Games

Other Darkisle resources from DRAKAT Games...

From the archives of **Darkisle**, the sort-of English and definitely fictitious island that was a byword for all things unnatural and eldritch....

Curious Calibres

Lucius Carnford was the island's leading expert on firearms during the 1920s, and ***Curious Calibres*** is one of his irregular publications about some of the more interesting guns that were available. It features information on six unusual types of pistol, lovingly reproduced in the original sepia.

Designed as a resource for any RPG set in the mid-20th Century, ***Curious Calibres*** gives full information on using these guns in your game, with specific stats for use with *Call of Cthulhu* rules.

Special Shotguns

Lucius Carnford produces another publication for the shooting community of Darkisle, this time concentrating on some of the more interesting shotguns available to the discerning gun collector of the 1920s. ***Special Shotguns*** features information on five interesting guns, reproduced in the original sepia.

Designed as a resource for any RPG set in the mid-20th Century, ***Special Shotguns*** gives full information on using these guns in your game, with specific stats for use with *Call of Cthulhu* rules.

On a Wing and a Wave

On a Wing and a Wave describes a small airline operating a single flying boat to a remote backwater. Full technical details are given for the Supermarine Sea Eagle, a real aircraft of the time, with two suggested liveries and a mono line diagram to use if you want to design your own.

Eldritch Fauna

Eldritch Fauna features Reverend Alfred Purefoy's accounts of five unpleasant, dangerous and downright strange animals. Ideal for unsettling player characters who are a long way from home.

Designed as a resource that will be useful in many RPGs, ***Eldritch Fauna*** gives full information on these fictional creatures, with specific stats for use with *Call of Cthulhu* rules.

Darkisle Stock Art series

Each Stock Art set features five atmospheric original colour images with an Impressionistic feel. Available for royalty-free use for any personal or commercial purpose (except for simple redistribution as images). All images are supplied in JPG format, with accompanying descriptive text.

- #1: Snowscapes
- #2: Tree-Cloaked Mysteries
- #3: Beside The Sea
- #4: Rural Disquiet
- #5: Smalltown Blight

Available from www.drivethrurpg.com

Contact us at drakatgames@gmail.com