

THE HIDDEN ONES

BESTIARY OF THE NORDIC FOLKLORE CREATURES

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This is a list of common creatures in Nordic folklore which you may encounter at the larp. As a whole, these supernatural creatures are referred to as “The Hidden Ones”, because of their tendency to be invisible or otherwise hidden from the human eye.

FAEFOLK (ÄLVA/ÄLVFOLK/FAERY/FAEFOLK)

The Nordic älvfolk differs quite fundamentally from their British equivalent, and especially so in how their society is structured and how they interact with humans. This faefolk is not divided into any courts, but rather they live in groups wherever they happen to find a satisfactory home. Local groups of fairies have little to no contact with others, and much like with the other creatures, there doesn't seem to be any sort of "faefolk society". Sometimes, however, they do have local kings or queens whom they serve.

Älvor generally look for entertainment and personal gain in all situations - they are shallow and vain creatures that show little interest in anything not immediately pleasurable or entertaining. They are also beings of strange and dangerous magic, often bringing illness and misfortune where they go. It is said that their dancing is what weaves the mist together and that the sound of silver bells or distant birdsong in the woods is simply how their language translates to human ears. They can shapeshift into various animals and alter their size, presenting as anything from a grown human to a delicate dragonfly.

They see humans as a sort of plaything, and dealing with them will often bring you more harm than good as they find their entertainment on your cost. It has happened that fairies do not merely seduce but also fall in love with humans, but that love tends to grow into obsession and lead to abduction, manipulation, and sometimes even death. It is certainly not any more pleasurable to be the recipient of their affections than that of their wrath.

To protect yourself against the älvfolk, you must act with caution: look where you step, for if there is a faerie circle you will be trapped. They trade in memories, emotions, and associations, so be careful not to offer them something with a

Tale of the North Wind

symbolic or sentimental value to you. And never join their dance, unless you are happy to dance until your body is so worn down all people will see is your head skipping around on its own.

HOUSE ELF (GÅRDSTOMTE / NISSE)

In Nordic folklore, house elves are small gnomes that help to look after the farm or house they live in - if treated well, that is. They can chop wood for the fireplace, milk the cows for you, or watch over the children as they sleep. To thank the house elves for their kindness, the family of the house traditionally leaves them a bowl of porridge, milk or some bread to eat. It is commonly known that house-elves have their own kind of powerful magic, which when used to your benefit is immensely helpful, but when used against you is incredibly dangerous - so making sure to stay on their good side is vital.

Actually meeting a house elf is rare, since they tend to be invisible, but when they choose to make themselves visible to humans they are usually dressed in greys and browns.

At the larp, the household game masters will play house elves - this enables them to diegetically do practical work as well as influence and enhance play. You can read more about this in the section titled "The House Elves" under "Game Mechanics" in the Design Document.

NIGHTMARE (NATTMARA / MARA)

When in the dead of night, you wake with pounding heart, still feeling the heavy weight on your chest suffocating you, you should know you are not alone. Most likely, in the gloom, you cannot see the thick tendrils of smoke that hastily exit through the tiniest crack in the wall. The Mare has had her ride and you are left, covered in cold sweat reliving the horrors of the dreams she brought you. Maybe you try to brush your fingers through your hair only to find it tangled into thick knots, marelocks.

The tales of the Mare have manifested in Scandinavian contemporary words of Nightmare, the Norwegian word "mareritt" and the Danish "mareridt" both directly translates "mare-ride". The Swedish word "mardröm" directly translates 'mare-dream'. These words still echo the power of the Mare, credit her with the nighttime horrors that sometimes plague our dreams.

The creature often takes on a female form, but she is able to dissolve her body into smoke, the better to enter and exit human dwellings. She is also capable of

Tale of the North Wind

transforming into different furry creatures, such as cats. Well inside a room she will crawl into her victim's bed and place herself astride the person's chest, suffocating them with her weight.

It is not only humans she seeks out after dark, also farm animals, mainly horses can attract her attention. She will ride them wild through the night and in the morning you'll find them drenched in sweat and exhausted.

There are ways to protect yourself against the Mare. You can try to slip a piece of steel beneath your bedding or a holy book. A mare-cross, or a mare-knot from a tree have sometimes been known to be effective. As she is quite obsessive, it is also possible to simply keep her occupied all night by placing seeds or hairs from for example a cow on the window sill. She will then be compelled to keep counting the items until morning, leaving you alone to sleep.

No one knows where the Mare comes from, some say she is a creature born of night and darkness while others claim she is a human who's been cursed. If the North wind knows the answer to this riddle, it won't tell, instead its whispering voice bears the warning; beware of the things that lurk in the dark.

MYLING

Its bones are sorrow, its blood regret and its soul is guilt.

Perhaps the most pitiful of all the world's known creatures is the Myling. A child born in secret, a result of unfaithfulness, sin or deceit. Buried in shame and awakened in darkness by an unquenchable thirst for revenge. If you happen to pass by its unmarked grave in the night, you may hear the heart wrenching, wailing sounds of its anguish.

The word Myling stems from the same roots as 'murder'. Not to wonder as the Myling is a child who was slain by the same people who should have cared for it the most. Now, having turned into a cold wraith, it longs for the name it was never given, the family who never wanted it or at the very least a resting place in holy ground, where it can finally find peace. But more than all of this it longs for vengeance, justice and for the truth to be known.

A stillborn child, or a child who dies of natural causes before being baptised (and thus cannot receive a Christian burial) also risks returning as a Myling.

Tale of the North Wind

In the cold whisper of its heart, The North wind carries the sad tales of these lost souls, whose small bones whither beneath dusty floorboards, mossy stones or in the wet depth of a forest mire.

'Mama, mother who never fed me,
Mama, mother who never clad me,
Mama, mother who never held me,
Mama, instead in blood you killed me,
Mama, instead in earth you buried me,
Mama, instead alone you left me.
Mama, mother I will come for thee.'

The Myling will take on the form of a child, approximately the age it should have been, had it been allowed to live. It will sometimes play pranks and act willful just as a child might. But more often it is malign and dangerous. It may jump on the back of a wanderer and demand to be carried until the bearer dies from fatigue. If it is able to find its mother it is most likely going to kill her.

As with other ghosts it is possible to lay these small, unquiet spirits to rest. If their remains are moved to be buried in holy ground or their mother's crime is brought to justice, they will finally be able to move on.

THE NIX (NÄCKEN / NØKKEN)

Promising tunes of a violin beautifully harmonizing with sounds of trickling water reaches you, as your walk near the stream. The enchanting music turns your movements into a dance, you don't understand, but you feel compelled to follow the song of the lake. You reach the banks, you know you shouldn't, but you can't help yourself, your dance brings you into the water. There you see him, a man with his violin, sitting on rock. Something is not right about him, you can't tell what, but you don't care as long as you can dance. You dance further and further into the water, nearer to the rock. The water becomes deeper and deeper, but you must keep dancing. You blink, the man is gone, the enchantment is broken, you are treading water. You feel a hand gripping your ankle and you are tugged below. Gone.

In Nordic folklore, The Neck is a water spirit who resides near water sources, luring primarily women (especially pregnant) and children to drown in lake and streams. Looking for love and people to share its underwater kingdom with, it is a lonely and sad creature.

Tale of the North Wind

While there are stories of harmless and even benevolent Necks, the North Wind does not carry many such tales. It is said that the Neck can be bargained with and that they can grant you significant boons if the deal is right. A bard may bargain away their first born in order to gain their talent, in the belief they would never have a child. Yet it never really turns out that way, does it?

While the Neck often appears as a violin playing male elegantly dressed, the creature does have shapeshifting abilities and it is uncertain if they have a true shape. Brook horse (Bäckhäst, bækhest), similarly to the Scottish kelpie, is one of the Necks shapes, often described as a majestic white horse. When the fog grows thick the water in the air allows the Neck to leave its lake and roam the land. If someone was to climb on to its back, they would be stuck, unable to leave. Then horse would then leap into deep water, taking its rider with it to drown.

HULDRA (HULDER/ SKOGRÅ/ HULDRA)

In the wild nature, every place is in the care of an Rå. In the tall mountains or dark mines, a Bergsrå reigns, while a lake is the realm of one of her sisters, a Sjørå. In the mighty forest the Skogsrå is the queen and as such she expects to be obeyed and adored. The birds sing her praise, the deer bow their heads, even the mighty elks will carry her on their backs. She is a Skogsrå, most fair to behold. At first she may appear human, but then you notice the tail peeking from under her skirts. If so, you must never gawk or point at it, as she will take great offence and an angered Huldra is most fearsome. The best thing is to carefully inform her that the 'hem of her dress' is hanging loose.

They say the back of a Huldra is the shape and form of a hollow tree, but she is careful not to let this show, even when in the arms of a lover. She often seeks out humans for companionship. Many unwary woodsman or charcoal burner have been approached by this wanton creature. She will try to seduce them, making them fall hopelessly in love with her. A man who has lain with a Huldra will never be himself again. In her arms he has left a piece of his heart and soul, and when she calls him he will be hard put to stay away. The rest of his life, he will carry a deep longing for the green, quiet solitude of the forest.

As long as a man remains true to the Huldra he will be safe in the forest, successful in hunting and life. If he, however, is unfaithful or tries to leave her, she will make him pay dearly. The man will find himself out of luck, having accidents - even fatal ones. If he's a hunter he will be unable to find any prey. Perhaps she will even steal his wits, leaving him a mindless burden to the woman he betrayed her with.

Tale of the North Wind

Sometimes the Huldra can be sweet and helpful, especially if you are courteous and respectful - perhaps leaving her a silver coin or a beautiful gift. Other times she is spiteful or full of mischief. One stormy night the North wind sang the tale of two charcoal burners. One was tall and the other one short. Apparently the Huldra took offence at this lack of symmetry. She cut the legs of the tall one and stretched the short one until they were of even height.

TROLL (TROLD)

Deep in the woods, usually through hidden entrances under roots or in rocks and mountain walls, you find the dwellings of the trolls. These humanlike creatures are characterized by their tails and large, pointy ears. They tend to have long hair and dress in furs and ragged clothes, decorated with whatever shiny trinkets they have come by.

Trolls are obsessed with the beauty of humans since they themselves tend to be distorted, ugly, and dirty. They steal children to keep in cages like songbirds, leaving changelings in their place, and often kidnap youths to marry off to their own kind. If you end up with a troll changeling in your house, you must not treat them badly, or the trolls will hurt your child in retaliation.

As individuals, they are quite different from one another - some only care for gold, while others will fall in love with a human and make great sacrifices for them. Some are dense and clumsy, others cunning and incredibly talented in magic or craftsmanship.

Most trolls live in harmony with their human neighbours and even trade with them. But once angered, they will retaliate. They hold grudges for generations, and will not rest until they get their revenge. The best way to defend yourself against a troll is by outsmarting them, wear iron in your boots for protection against their magic, sing a Christian song, ring the church bell, or place an iron cross between you and the creature (you can achieve this using a pair of iron scissors).

What will you do when you face down Troll, as the North Wind reaches Woodhill?

THE VITTER (VITTRA/VITTERFOLK)

There is a world quite close to our own, in fact it lies right out of the corner of your eye. Perhaps you've seen something - a flash of color or movement just out of sight, but when you turn around there is nothing there. It may be that you've caught a glimpse of the world of the vitterfolk. There are places where this

Tale of the North Wind

'other' world is especially close, entwining with our own. Some say it lies underground, others that it is separated from ours by nothing but a thin veil. If you walk down a path in the forest and you sense a sudden inexplicable change, the temperature rising or falling, the light turning dim or the grass glowing extraordinarily green, that means you have stumbled upon one of the paths of the vitterfolk, a 'vitterroad', and without intending to you've crossed the thin veil that separates their realm from ours.

When visible, the vitterfolk resemble humans in many ways, except they are all unusually beautiful and well-clad. In the winter when the farmers have left their mountain farms the vitterfolk make good use of them. Sometimes farmhands herding the cattle down into the valley hear the melodious tolling of cowbells going the other way, up the mountain. That means they've met the vitterfolk returning to their winter homes.

The cattle of the vitterfolk are exceptional creatures. No matter the size of the pail, milking a vittercow or goat will always fill the bucket to the brim. The milk in itself is both thick and sweet and has the power of healing. If you dare, you can try to capture one of the vitterbeasts by throwing a knife over their backs or braiding an iron needle into their fur.

For the most the vitterfolk keep to themselves, but if angered they are a dire foe. The Northwind tells the tale of a farmer who had the nerve to laugh at a vittergirl who'd fallen into a pond. From that day on, his well ran dry and the brook that used to water his cattle changed its path to run around his land. Turned to ruin, the farmer had no choice but to move. When he was gone, the brook once again returned to its original course and the well filled with water.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP (LYKTGUBBE)

As day turns to dusk and light turns to dark, the nighttime creatures of the forest awaken. Shadows lengthen, transforming the once familiar path into a treacherous illusion of safety, likely to abandon you at any time. Faint lights appear amidst the black trunks of high trees. What are these things? Some sweet fairies here to save you? No - they are Lyktgubbar, Will-o-wisps, bobbing and waving their lanterns.

Some say Lyktgubbar are the restless spirits who were not allowed to enter heaven, now doomed to roam the earth. Some name them elemental beings carrying fire in their hearts. Yet others say that they are ghosts protecting a hidden treasure. Whatever their origin, these creatures and their enchanted

Tale of the North Wind

lights are not to be trusted, as they are likely to lead you astray. One story tells of a Woodhill farmer who, long ago, had lost his way home from a fair. He wandered in the dark and misty wood, when he found a light traveling before him, carried by a dusky little figure. He followed it for several miles, when suddenly he found himself on the brink of a frightful precipice. As he stumbled, balancing on the edge, he saw the light fly across the gulf as the creature carrying the lantern took a great leap. Well on the other side, the light suddenly went out and a malicious laughter echoed through the forest.

Lyktgubbar are notorious, wicked pranksters, leading travelers to sink into deep mires or stumble down ravines. If angered, they have the ability of twisting your sight, making it impossible for you to ever find your way again. You may break the spell or even protect yourself against these mischievous spirits; if you turn your cap or your jacket inside out. This will make them lose their power over you.

However there are some who attest to having been helped by Lyktgubbar. When paid handsomely the Wisps may be persuaded to show you the right way. If your station allows it, always carry a silver coin when venturing out as twilight draws nigh. If money is scarce, so the North Wind says, you can gain the favour of the Wisps by telling a secret to the mire in the forest. Secrets are a currency all creatures of the woods value. Because stories hold power.

THE LITTLE ONES (DE UNDERJORDISKA / PYSSLINGAR)

Underneath the floorboards of human houses are the homes of The little ones. Unlike many other fae creatures they enjoy being close to humans. Some say the House Gnomes, Hustomten, are of their ilk. Though they are prone to mischief and like to borrow things from their human neighbours, they are mostly friendly or at least not hostile, except when angered. When emptying the washbasin or chamber pot you should always call out a warning first, so as not to douse an unsuspecting Little One.

For the most part The Little Ones stay invisible, but they may show themselves to, or even befriend, a human, especially a child. The Little Ones are indeed very small, no larger than a rat, otherwise they are quite like humans in appearance.

Since they live so close to humans, some conflicts are inevitable. For being of the 'others', The Little Ones are quite patient and well tempered however and will first try to negotiate their grievances. For example that a dunghill needs to be

Tale of the North Wind

moved, since the horse muck keeps trickling down onto their dinner table. When treated well, The Little ones can be both helpful and generous. To leave out food, or some other offerings can ensure the health and happiness of both the animals and people of the farm.

THE GUARDIAN SPIRITS (HALTIJA / VÄKI)

A haltija is a spirit or a gnome-like creature from the Finnish folklore, tied to a place or a thing, such as house, sauna, shed, forge, forest or treasure. Their job is to guard and help, bringing good luck and prosperity to those who honour the place they're protecting, but also capable of causing horrible misfortune and injury if angered. If a hunter asks for the blessing of haltijas when going hunting and treats the forest respectfully, their catch would be plentiful, but if they anger the spirits in some way they might get attacked by animals instead. In a similar vein, water haltijas might either give the fishermen good fishing luck or lure unfortunate travelers into the water to drown.

There are different groups of haltijas called väki, which simultaneously means people or folk and strength or power. These are often the same thing: for example metsän väki (forest folk) means both forest spirits and the powers of the forest, so you basically call upon them both. Some of the most common väki include forest, water, fire, iron and death. There's also naisen väki, väki of woman, that isn't really associated with spirits but means the magical powers of women. Different folks were also thought to be fighting against each other, and an illness caused by one could be healed by another. If you got sick while swimming, the illness caused by water haltijas could be driven away in sauna, the domain of fire haltijas.

Haltijas might also abduct humans into their world. This is called metsänpeitto, "covered by the forest", and it happens subtly and unexpectedly: you might just be taking a walk in the forest, and suddenly you can't recognize your surroundings anymore. The forest quiets down, things might feel upside down, and the way home is no longer where it used to be. If someone goes looking for you, you can see them but they can't see or hear you. You might even become completely unable to speak or move. Luckily, there are spells and tricks to get out of metsänpeitto, such as turning a clothing item inside out or looking between your legs to see the right road again.