

Isles of the Celts

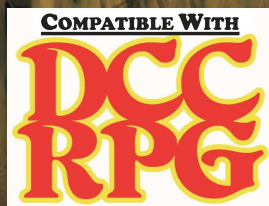


An RPG Game World Setting
By Ed Stanek

This product is compatible with the
Dungeon Crawl Classics Role Playing Game.



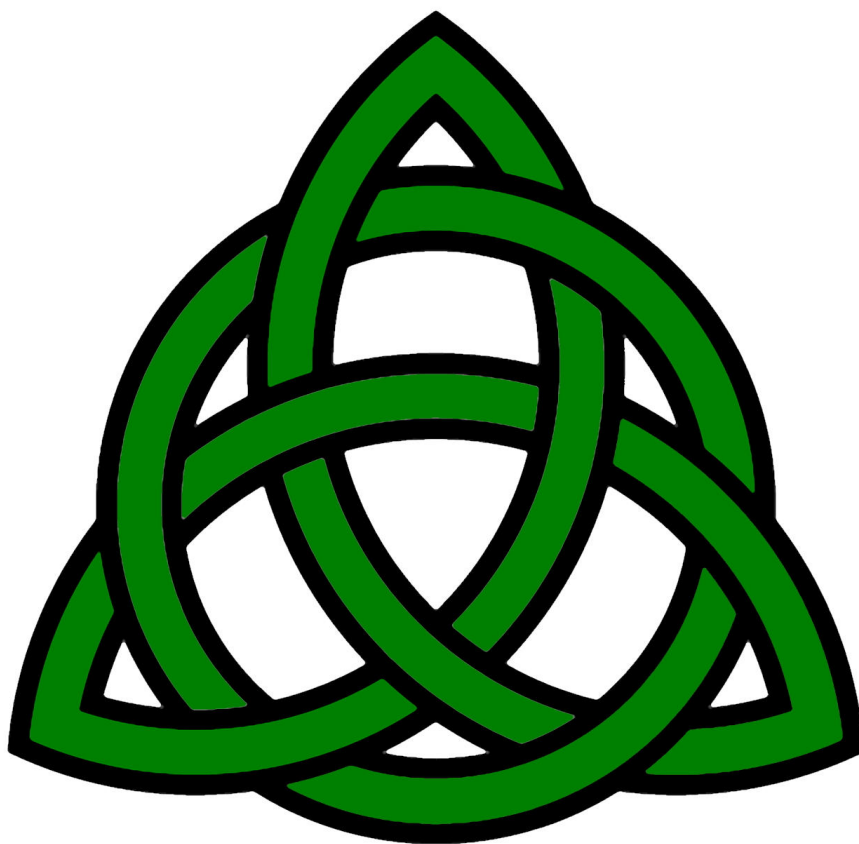
Raorgen Games



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Introduction

Isles of the Celts is an expansion of the campaign world presented in the Pax Lexque Campaign Guide. It can be used in conjunction with the Pax Lexque Campaign Guide or it may stand on its own.

Pax Lexque is a campaign setting based on an alternate reality historical earth in which the Roman Empire was co-mingled with conventional elements of fantasy. Naturally, this means there is significant departure from actual Roman history, but certain common concepts about ancient Rome can still provide a context for setting the atmosphere. Likewise, this volume is not meant to be historically accurate, but rather to present a setting that is similar to the Celtic cultures of our British Isles.

In this world, the Roman Empire was well established at its maximum extent for 200 years. There was very little magic being used aside from that which the elves and gnomes channeled as part of their natural state. Then the tomb of a pharaoh which had remained undisturbed in the desert of Aegypt for thousands of years was breached and became the source of long lost magics. A magical arms race culminating in the Wars of Darkness tore the empire apart and lay waste to much of the Great Sea region. In this world, the Roman incursion into Britain was unsuccessful, leaving Britain under Celtic control.

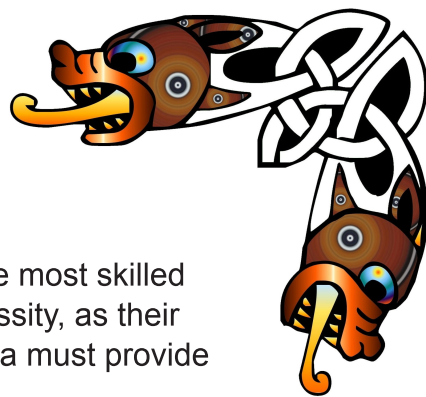
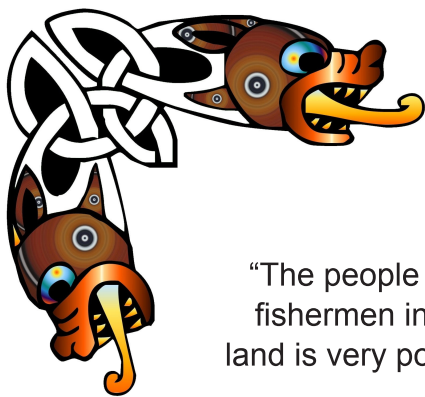
This guide is meant as a sandbox environment. The world of the Celtic isles is presented with its legends and geography broken down to fourteen kingdoms, ready for characters to explore. Ten new patrons particular to this world are described, five of which are presented in full detail, complete with patron spells.

Also given detailed attention herein are the magical races of the fey. Some are helpful, some mischievous and some sinister, but they all are enigmatic from the point of view of other beings. The seelie and unseelie courts are detailed as well as twenty one different types of fey

The Pax Lexque campaign setting and the Isles of the Celts expansion are designed for use with the Dungeon Crawl Classics rule system. They include several unofficial expansions of the base rules. If you would prefer to not use those expansions, simply ignore them and default to standard DCC rules. None of the expansions are critical to the nature of the campaign world. Several unofficial classes are listed in the Classes section of the document: Bard, Druid, Fey-touched and Witch. Finally, this guide references two additional alignments, good and evil.







Catach

“The people of Catach are said to be among the most skilled fishermen in the world. This has come by necessity, as their land is very poorly suited to agriculture, so the sea must provide most of their sustenance.”

Ailuin Faeynore, elven geographer



Geography

Isolated in the northern coastal highlands of Alba, the land of Catach is perhaps the most loosely connected and sparsely populated of the tribal regions on the island of Brython. Its population is spread out among the rough terrain in a scattering of villages dispersed among its rocky hills. Likewise, many tiny fishing villages line its coasts in the countless inlets that slice up its coastline. These inlets offer relative safety compared to the rough waters of the open sea.

Society

The Celts are generally not known for being pioneering shipbuilders, but the people of Catach have managed to develop low-draft fishing boats that fare very well in the treacherous waters of the open sea. They are likewise quite skilled at handling these boats in rough seas, even with a boat full of fish. Fishing is a family affair for the people of Catach, involving the father of a household and his sons or younger brothers. Regardless of the season, the fishermen of Catach are well cautious of the danger of overfishing in a particular area and so will sometimes sail up or down the coast for a day before casting their nets, a practice locally called a “fish camp”.

The hilly terrain and seemingly incessant days of rain make travel between the villages difficult. As such, communication throughout the tribe is very limited. The exception to this is the summer solstice festival called Samhradh. At this time, all of the tribe descends on the town of Gairloch to renew their loyalty to the tribe. This week long festival provides the different clans of the tribe a chance to exchange tales, news, goods and even people. Many adolescent girls leave the festival with a different family than their own, marrying into a new clan. This helps prevent intermarriage within the small clans.

Catach is considered a tribe or chiefdom rather than a kingdom. The current leader of the tribe of Catach is Chief Onnist, son of Uven of Clan Aeda. He is a towering man in his mid fifties, well respected by his clan and tribe. Onnist is a strong and skilled warrior. It is said that on a hunting trip, he once killed a bear with a single spear throw. That bear's skull now sits atop the same spear outside the chief's home as a reminder.

Chief Onnist's leadership style emphasizes the importance of peace and cooperation among the clans as being critical to the survival of the tribe. He has no tolerance for quarrels and feuds between families. A tale is told of an argument that arose at the Samhradh festival between the two largest clans. A young boy from one clan was playing with a goat of the other clan and the goat bit the child's finger so severely, it was sure to be lost. The child's father demanded recompense from the other clan's leader. As the argument escalated, the offended father even came to insist that the other man's son must lose one of his fingers as consequence. Chief Onnist firmly demanded that both men stand down as they were an embarrassment to their clans. As both men only responded by escalating their threats, Chief Onnist called for an axe. As the gathered throng paused to see what was to happen, the chief defiantly cut off one of his own fingers with the axe, tossed it to the offended father and sternly said “The debt is paid,” while staring at both fathers with thunderous intensity. In the hushed silence, both men walked away properly humbled and the chief's already larger than life reputation only increased in stature among his people.

The clans of the Catach tribe are Cinadhon, Ciniath, Conall, Elphin, Nehhton, Tarla and Uradech.



Religion & supernatural

The people of Catach pay particular reverence to Cuani, the mother of the sea. They see her as their provider, though one who must be placated from time to time with gifts. Each bay, inlet and lake also has its own spirit that must be shown proper respect. The winter solstice is set aside as a particular time to make offerings to Cuani and to these spirits in recognition of the importance of the fishing bounty during the lean months of winter.

The other primary festival is the Sithurram. This festival, held on the spring equinox, involves preparing special gifts of food and crafts to be given to the local fey creatures. Some items are left on a pile of rock in the woodlands, some left on a fencepost around a sheep pen and others buried near the peak of the highest hill in the area. It is recognized by all that encouraging the friendship of the fey is useful towards avoiding misfortune.

Folklore

Many years ago, when the Celts first settled in the land of Catach, they sought at first to cultivate the land, as had been their tradition since time immemorial. It soon became clear though that the growing season in Catach was so short that the land would provide little bounty for them. The tribe severely thinned their flocks of goats and sheep that first year, nearly to the point that the flocks could not be sustained, as they were desperate to supplement their meager farming.

One night, a druid of the tribe by the name of Alpin received a vision in a dream. A voice coming from the sea called to him in a song:

Suidhich do làmhan air bàtaichean a dhèanamh

Agus gluais air na tonnan beò agam

Oir beathaichidh mi do shluagh

Ma dh'ionnsaicheas tu m'ainm a ghairm

Set your hands to making boats

And move upon my living waves

For I will feed your people

If you learn to call my name

Over and over the song's haunting melody called to the druid in his dream. When he woke, the man walked down to the shore and closed his eyes, listening to the rhythm of the waves, a rhythm that seemed to time with the melody of his dream. He sang the song back to the ocean, listening still. The next wave that rolled ashore deposited twelve fish at his feet before receding back to the sea. Alpin shared his vision with the tribe and exhorted them to begin building boats. As the people began to take to the open ocean, Cuani, the sea mother guided their way and kept them safe from the waves.

Initially, the people of Catach honored Cuani and recognized her protection, but as they grew in skill, they became blinded by their pride, convinced that they had accomplished this craft on their own cleverness. A boat had come in from a catch and had declined to return a portion to the sea to honor Cuani. When that same boat went out the next day, Cuani summoned a storm of terrifying intensity which ripped the boat apart. The men aboard it were cursed to forever swim that channel, calling upon their brethren to avoid their fate, taking on an appearance much like their new watery home. Centuries later, now called "Blue men of the minch", they are sometimes still spotted by fishermen passing through those waters. They call out to the fishermen by singing the first two lines of the Song of Alpin "Suidhich do làmhan air bàtaichean a dhèanamh, agus gluais air na tonnan beò agam". If the fishermen fail to respond with the next two lines, the blue men will capsize their boat and drag them down to join the blue men's curse.





The Fey Folk

a dissertation by Ailuin Faeynore, elven geographer

They are known by many names and those names are variously spelt - faeries or fairies, aos si, sidhe, the fair folk, or simply the fey. Regardless of the name one uses, it is critical to remember that this is not one homogenous group of beings. One ought not to expect any two types of fey to act the same, nor any two of the same type nor even the same individual faerie from one moment to the next. That's not to say that there aren't certain patterns and similarities, simply that it is complacent and foolish for a mortal to believe that they understand and can predict the fey in general, or even being able to understand an individual faerie. The information presented here must be considered in that context. Very few notions herein ought to be considered absolutes when applied to the fey. This author apologizes for the lack of specificity and certainty on so many of the topics herein, but when discussing the fey, such an approach is unavoidable if one is to be honest and accurate. The byword with all mortal interactions with the fey boils down to this - proceed always with caution, for there is always more than meets the eye.

The Commonalities

With the above disclaimer still in mind, we will present nevertheless to the reader certain generalities that appear to be true for all, or nearly all fey. The starting point to understand is that the fey are not flesh and blood beings in the sense that mortals tend to think. That's not to say that they are insubstantial, though they may sometimes be. Rather, it means quite literally what was said - the "flesh" of fey is not like that of mortal beings and most of them have nothing at all resembling blood. Were a faerie to be opened up (ignoring the uncertainty of how to do such a thing), one would not find the organs that one finds inside a human, an elf, a dwarf and a halfling. There are no stomach, lungs, entrails, sinew and the like. There is a heart inside the faerie, in a manner of speaking, but this is a special thing unto itself.

What is referred to as the fey heart is more closely resembling what is often spoken of metaphorically as the human "heart" than an actual physical heart. It is not an organ that moves blood, for as was mentioned faeries do not have blood in the sense that mortal beings do. The fey heart is a magical focus inside the fey, in roughly the same location as the human heart, and roughly the same size, proportionately speaking. It is the core and center of their being, the concentrated source of their emotion. If a faerie is grievously injured so that the heart is exposed, it will be seen to emanate a certain radiance. The nature of this radiance varies by the type of fey. For the light-hearted faeries such as pixies, this radiance is a visible glow of multicolored light. For a dark-hearted fey such as a gwana, this radiance is a shadow that seems to suck in all natural light.



The Fey Bargain

The nature of the deal

Even the most chaotic of faeries operate under certain rules which they are unable to break. The most fundamental of these is the bargain. Faeries will often make bargains with mortals, seeking something that will bring them power or delight, generally in return for an exercise of their magical abilities. There are two rules which a faerie must adhere to for such bargains: they are incapable of lying about the terms of the deal, and they must uphold their side of the bargain.

With respect to the terms, the constraint is that the faerie cannot outright lie. This is more than simply a rule; it is an immutable compulsion. This does nothing to prevent them from being intentionally vague and/or misleading. In fact, it should be assumed that any faerie making a bargain is being evasive about the particulars of their side of the deal. Even a well-intended faerie will be instinctively vague about a deal being made and will parse their words in a less than obvious fashion purely out of their nature. With evil fey, this naturally is an intentional effort to bring the greatest woe upon the mortal making the deal. For a good fey, this often happens without them even thinking about it. Mortals are generally naive about this duplicitous approach and even when wary are generally not cunning enough to spot the faerie's word play. A dark fey knows this full well and exploits it to their benefit, whereas other fey often are unaware and in fact can't grasp the notion that mortals don't understand such subtleties. The terms of a bargain may be renegotiated if both parties agree to the new terms, though this simply provides yet another opportunity for the faerie to dupe the mortal with newly obfuscated terms.

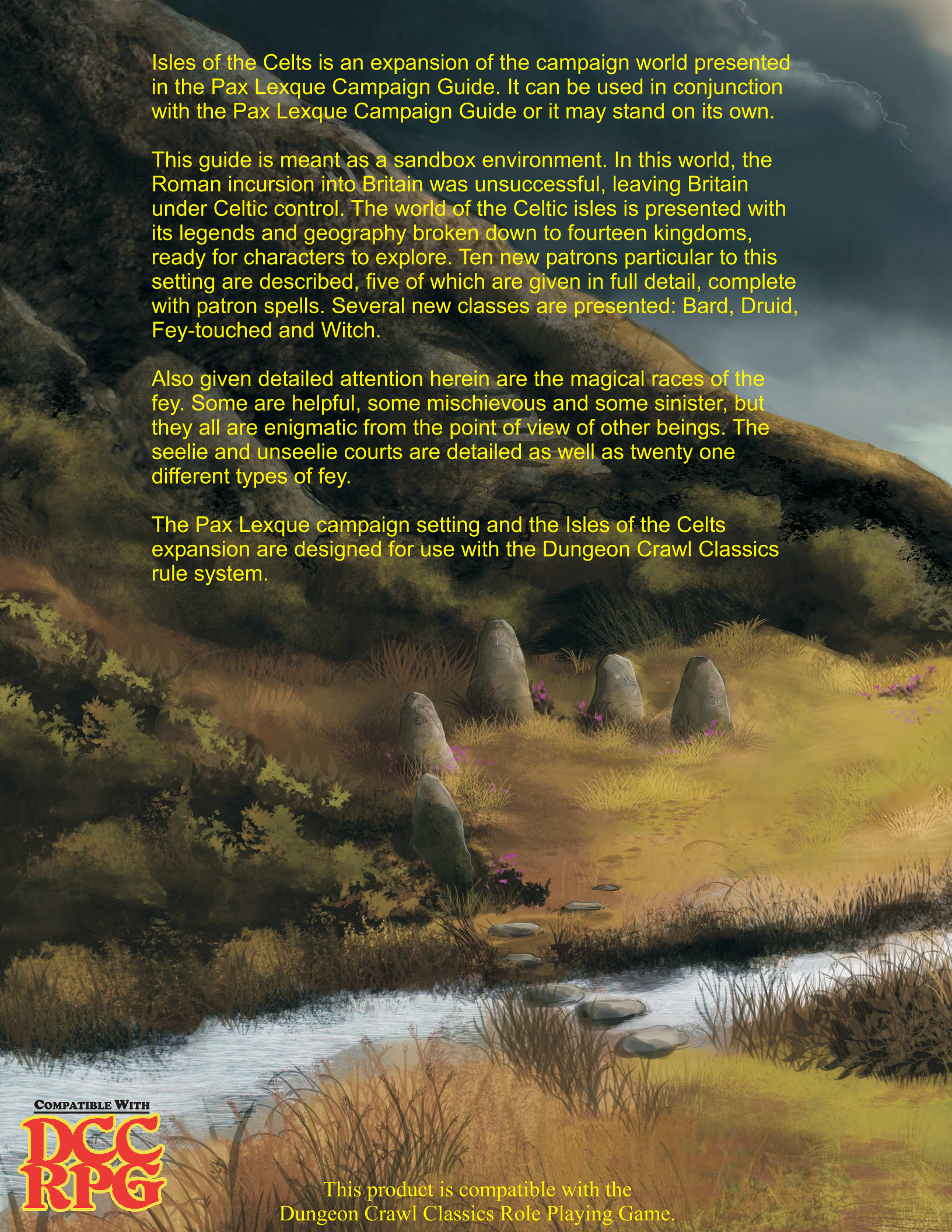
The other rule, that a faerie must uphold their end of a bargain, is likewise more than simply a rule. It also is a part of the faerie's being, compelling them, against any desires to the contrary, to fulfill what they bargained for. If, for whatever reason, a faerie is incapable of fulfilling its side of a bargain, e.g. it is imprisoned in an iron cage at the time the deal is to be fulfilled, it will begin to quickly lose strength, weakening with each passing day until it fades away and perishes [-1d3 stamina and personality each day].

If the mortal who made a bargain with a fey fails to live up to their side of the bargain, the faerie is sure to hunt and torment the mortal to the fullest extent of their power. Often, such repercussion involves channeling the magic of the bargain to exact such fates as trapping the mortal in one of the more dreadful regions of Elphyne for anywhere from 100 years to eternity, depending on the nature of the deal. Even a very light-hearted faerie can be stirred to great wrath if a mortal intentionally fails their part of a bargain. In many cases, if a faerie has reason to doubt that the mortal will follow through when their time comes, it will work a failure clause into the deal, spelling out exactly what will happen to the mortal who reneges on a bargain.

What's in it for the mortal?

What sorts of things will a faerie typically offer in a bargain? The fey are masters of discerning what an individual mortal desperately desires most of all and thus will be willing to pay a very dear price for. Many of the boons a faerie will promise involve infusing a tiny bit of fey essence into the mortal.





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**DCC
RPG**

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