

Ironsworn_Story_004

Last time our hero, Valgrym, spent some time as a slave, cutting peat. Things went from grim to grimmer. He met an old mercenary who had both his eyes cut out by the overseers for trying to escape!



Whatever moves I tried, the dice were cruel. In order to give the story more time to unfold, I decided to look for a satisfying narrative way out.

A quick google for a likely location based on the Oracles' "hills" and "swamp" came up with Peatbog Faeries (in the real world a folk band who happen to be advertised in the local Malvern Hills). I hadn't intended to have faeries play much part in the early story, but it seems Ironsworn has a different idea!

Enter the Peatbog Faerie, a scrawny brown man, 18 inches high, naked and splattered with streaks of blood.



I just found this image to represent him. I imagine him whistling down a beautiful butterfly to land on his hand, then quickly stuffing it into his mouth and continuing to talk while the legs kick a few last times.

To explain why the faerie bothers to interact with Valgrym, I decided the "Ritual" asset he had been given by the Drake he defeated in chapter 1, meant he now has some magical potential which the faerie could sense.

Our hero needs his iron leg shackles removing and I've already introduced the idea that faeries hate/fear iron, so I can't just have him "magic" them off. After a few moments thought, a cunning plan occurred to me (and therefore occurred to "Peatbog") and a way to give Valgrym some side-quests as payment for the faerie's help.

During the fight last time, I'd imagined Valgrym being badly beaten-up and due to one of the "Pay the Price" rolls, described him grovelling and begging for his life. I've never had a D&D character

behave like this – they are usually incredibly brave and likely to wisecrack in the face of terrible danger, certainly never giving-up, curling into a ball and just hoping the enemies don't kill them! It felt like the right response at the time – Valgrym is still young, not a veteran warrior and he must have felt he was hopelessly out-numbered and it was the end of his quest and that not only was he going to die, but Gwenneth would never be rescued. I stripped him of some Spirit points due to the despair and the shame for what I'm sure he would (unreasonably, I think) see as cowardice.

I wanted to give him a way to regain some self-respect, so, rather than simply escape, I decided to try to rescue poor, blind Yan too. He agreed to do a second quest for the strange little man, in exchange for also freeing Yan and when "Peatbog" returned a couple of days later with "magic" berries, they both swallowed one and **DIED IN AGONY...**

UNEXPECTEDLY, VALGRYM'S STORY CONINUES...

"Is this the afterlife? Has my cowardice condemned me to the lowest hell?" The smell of burning seemed to support that theory. Then he heard Yan's voice cursing, and felt the old man wriggling underneath him!

They dragged themselves out of a shallow pit, pushing burning straw and logs aside. Both were naked, their skins yellow and spotted with blue-brown sores. It was dark, the moon shrouded in dark clouds.

Old Yan was rubbing his ankles and the boy realised that the leg-irons had been removed!

The gnarled figure of the "Peatbog Faerie" grinned at him from beneath a nearby gorse bush.

"What did you do?"

"As if that matters boy. Thanks would be more fitting than questions! Typical of a mortal. These bigguns thought ya was dead and full a plague. Tossed ya in a pit and set fire to ya and walked away, but not before they struck off the filthy iron. ... thought that would work."

Valgrym rubbed smoke from his eyes "You THOUGHT it would work! What if they had left the irons on and scraped them from the ashes after?"

The little man rubbed his chin "I suppose they might have, but what's done is done. I've done my end of the bargain – you're out of the irons and I've helped you get away. Now there's the little matter of me two quests."

Valgrym could see they were only 50 yards or so from the overseer's huts. "We're out of the irons, I'll grant you, but ... AWAY?"

The little man pointed back into the fire and chuckled. "I fed their dog the last of the berries – he went in there with ya, but by the time he wakes up, he'll be burned to a cinder. The rest is up to you and him".

Yan was confused, unclear who the second voice was, but willing to be dragged away from the fire by Valgrym.

THE STORY

Should they run? How far could they expect to get without supplies? Should they try something dangerous - like stealing something from the huts? Or something even more formidable, killing the overseers and somehow releasing the rest of the slaves?

The hammer and chisel that they need to smash out the pin in leg irons is in the small stone hut to the left. There may be other equipment (weapons or tools in there).

The remaining overseers (only 4 of them currently here – the other 3 are away delivering a cartload of Peat) are drinking in a wooden hut to the right. There would be food and clothing in there.

Valgrym points out to “Peatbog” that he won’t be able to perform any quests if he gets re-captured or killed, so the little man had better continue to help them if he can.

In the almost pitch darkness away from the fire, Yan is no worse off than Valgrym. There is only a small amount of light from the wooden hut – the men have a fire in the hearth and maybe a candle on the table where they sit drinking and playing a game with pins in a board – Nine Men’s Morris.

“Weapons first, from the stone hut”. There is too much iron there as it has been used as a forge, for the faerie to scout it out, so Valgryn goes in alone.

THE GAME MECHANICS

As I see it, the options are to risk one of these moves...

Gather Information or Secure an Advantage to get some idea how to escape or find equipment.

Face Danger when he is ready to attempt something.

Undertake a Journey when they are ready to try to make it to a village.

I’m going to grant him points in each of Spirit, Health and Momentum taking all to +3 to represent the upsurge of hope and the presence of allies (even though one is blind and the other is only 18 inches tall!)

MOVE:Gather Information

Action Dice 5 +2 Wits = 7

Challenge Dice 4 & 5, so STONG HIT

At last, good dice 🎲 V gains +2 momentum, discovers useful info and knows what to do.

Valgrym’s current state is Momentum +5, Spirit +3, Supply +1, Health +3

Sneak to the deserted stone hut, can they make it undetected and what do they find there?

MOVE:Face Danger

Action Dice 2 +1 Shadow = 3

Challenge Dice 7 & 8, so MISS

OOPS! Dramatic and costly turn of events.

THE STORY

No weapon to be found other than the hammer and chisel, but in the darkness, he knocks over a bucket of nails which crashes to the ground. The sound of raised voices comes from the other hut!

Light spills from the doorway as two of the men emerge, one carrying a torch and sword, the other a spear. They stroll across to the stone hut. Valgrym is cowering inside. Blind Yan is pressed to the wall at the back. "Peatbog" has vanished.

Valgrym decides to try and extinguish the torch. In the dark, Yan will not be at a disadvantage and maybe can help. The boy grabs a bucket of filthy water and hurls it at the man with the torch as he pokes his head into the hut.

The torch goes out – total darkness! The two men curse.

Yan charges around the corner and leaps at sound of a voice. His strong fingers grabbing for the man's throat.

Valgrym swings the iron hammer at where the first man's head ought to be.

The battle is a blur of screams and violence. Valgrym has to be pulled from the body of the first man as Yan tells him "It's over, you finished him" to stop the boy continuing to smash the man's head into bloody pulp.

More light comes from the wooden hut. Shouts and the last two slavers come charging out – one with a Torch and a short spear, the leader with a wicked-looking sword.

Snatching up the weapons from the dead men, Valgrym presses the sword into Yan's hand and takes the spear for himself. They stand ready as the two burly warriors rush upon them.

The spearman attacks Valgrym while the leader – Myrick - the man who cut out Yan's eyes, confidently hacks at the blind man.

THE GAME MECHANICS

Ask the Oracle – how many of the four slavers will come to investigate? 2 (likely) or roll 1d6 with 4,5&6 being all of them. D100=69, so 2.

One brigand would be Troublesome, two become a "pack" and would be Dangerous especially as they have deadly weapons. However, Valgrym has some help from Yan (although blind and old, he used to be a professional warrior)

MOVE:Secure an Advantage

Action Dice 6 +2 Wits = 8

Challenge Dice 7 & 5, so **STONG HIT**

Gain Advantage – make another move at +1 or gain +2 momentum.

MOVE:Enter the Fray

Action Dice 4 +3 Iron +1 = 8

Challenge Dice 7 & 10, so **WEAK HIT**

Either ~~+2 momentum~~ or **take the initiative**

I'm going to resolve this with **BATTLE** as the second fight (with the leader of the slavers and the other man, can hopefully be the main event)

MOVE:Battle

Action Dice 3 +3 Iron = 6

Challenge Dice 3 & 2, so **STRONG HIT** 🤪

Unconditional success and +2 momentum

I'll make a Dangerous Progress track for the next fight.

MOVE:Enter the Fray

Action Dice 4 +3 Iron = 7

Challenge Dice 6 & 2, so **STRONG HIT**

Either ~~+2 momentum~~ or **take the initiative**

Oracle 13 Ironlander Names D100=74

THE STORY

In the first clash of spears, Valgrym side-steps his opponent's thrust and skewers him through the chest, the man drops, eyes wide and blood frothing. His torch starts to sputter and go out as it hits the ground.

Myrick stoops to grab it and blows on it frantically to try to fan it back to brightness.

From the branch of a tree overhead a thin stream of golden water descends, sizzling as it hits the torch. "Peatbog" sighs theatrically. "I'm not really helping you for free you know – I wouldn't want to set a precedent!"

Yan snarls with hatred – "Take my eyes will you, you waste of skin!" and the swords clash in the absolute darkness.

Perhaps some glint of starlight from his sword gave him away, but Myrick parried and struck back. The blade must have gone into the old man's guts. Myrick twisted savagely and wrenched it out, hot entrails spilled out and Yan collapsed with a moan.

The moon came out from behind a cloud and Myrick turned to the horror-stricken boy with a vicious grin. "You're soon going to wish that had been you, boy. I'm going to hurt you so bad you'll be begging for death!"

Valgrym held his spear before him but it shook and his legs felt like jelly. Tears sprang to his eyes. He desperately tried to hold off the big man.

The sword swing sprayed his face with Yan's hot blood, but as he withdrew in revulsion Myrick left himself open for one desperate thrust.

The spear ripped open his throat and the man clutched feebly at the wound as a cascade of blood gushed out. Myrick fell alongside the body of Yan whose lips twitched in a grim smile.

THE GAME MECHANICS

MOVE:Strike

Action Dice 6 +3 Iron = 9

Challenge Dice 8 & 5, so STRONG HIT

+1 damage and retain initiative

(so V manages to do 6 out of 10 boxes!)

As Yan isn't a Companion Asset, he can't actually make any Moves, but for the fiction, he's the one making the Strike and potentially getting himself killed first!

MOVE:Strike

Action Dice 1 +3 Iron = 4

Challenge Dice 9 & 9, so MISS with a MATCH!

So glad I'd already said it would be Yan paying the price for this!

... and V loses initiative.

To vary the Moves a bit, I'll switch to Face Danger and see if Valgrym's Skirmisher asset can do any good.

MOVE:Face Danger (Skirmisher Asset)

Action Dice 2 +3 Iron = 5

Challenge Dice 3 & 4, so STRONG HIT

Successful + 1 momentum

Skirmisher Bonus = Strike now with +1

MOVE:Strike

Action Dice 5 +3 Iron = 8

Challenge Dice 8 & 2, so WEAK HIT

Inflict harm and lose initiative

This is just enough damage to kill Myrick (because I only made him Dangerous)

THE STORY

The next few hours passed in a daze as he walked out to the cave and smashed open the leg irons of the remaining slaves.

When it was done they carried the slaver's bodies to the fire-pit.

When the other slavers returned the next day, they were ambushed and slaughtered and followed their leader into the flames.

Yan's body had been wrapped in a blanket and loaded onto the cart. A couple of the survivors were from Gloucester and agreed to take him back to his family and explain what had happened.

It was the following night that "Peatbog" returned when Valgrym was sitting alone under a tree, staring uncomfortably at the bundle on the cart.

"A sad end for the old man... sad indeed but he lived to see his enemy perish... so a good night's work over-all, I'd say".

He snapped off a small sprouting twig from the back of his leg and chewed on it thoughtfully, making Valgrym laugh and then "Peatbog" laughed too.

"As to the first Quest, it is to be done and done quickly – before the month's end. The Sword of Kings must be returned. It was stolen by a priest and carried off to the big church in Gloucester. It's carried by the Bishop there I'm told. It's mine and I want it back. I can't enter the hallowed ground, so you, mortal man, must get it for me."

Valgrym argued that he had a pressing Quest of his own – Gwenneth must be found and Radka the Witch must be killed. But "Peatbog" stood firm breaking an oath to a faerie would invoke terrible consequences.

Valgrym will accompany the body of Yan and tell his tale to Yan's son and daughter-in-law.

He will be able to Sojourn there and hopefully be further restored.

THE GAME MECHANICS

I decided that this victory (and the victory over the Drake in Chapter 1) add-up to some progress on the Quest to Find Gwenneth, so have marked off the first progress box.

I could choose to regain the Companion:Horse (by taking the one from the Slaver's cart) but I'm going to decide that what made it a Companion was that particular horse "Snowfoot" and if he wants it back, he'll have to find the band of brigands who originally captured him. (good opportunity for revenge too).

What sort of Quest could a magical faerie need a mortal to do for him? I decided on "retrieve something from holy ground".

I decided to call it the Sword of Kings (but it will actually only be dagger-sized – but a great sword for "Peatbog").

I've decided that "Peatbog" is going to be a more major figure in the setting, so he will be The King of the Peatbog Faeries. Valgrym is grateful and "Peatbog" is friendly, so I'll try...

MOVE:Forge a Bond (with "Peatbog")
Action Dice 5 +2 Heart = 7
Challenge Dice 5 & 7, so WEAK HIT but spend my 7 Momentum to turn it into a STRONG HIT
+1 Spirit, +2 Momentum (after reset = +4)

I want a reason for the side quest to be done before Valgrym's two major quests, so have decided to give it a time limit.

MOVE:Swear an Iron Vow
Action Dice 2 +2 Iron +1 Bond = 5
Challenge Dice 10 & 2, so WEAK HIT
+1 momentum, but more questions than answers

The first side quest for "Peatbog" will only be "Troublesome"