

EDGE OF THE WILD

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FROM THE EDITOR:

Greetings and welcome to the Summer 2018 issue of *Edge of the Wild*! At this time in the year, Nature has gone far beyond the first early shoots and buds of Spring, and has now put forth all her energies in the form of plentiful greenery. As the days lengthen, I mark the passing of the season by a pageant of familiar signs: ripe cherries and mulberries, waves of cattails' yellow flower-spikes, the musk of chestnut pollen, daylilies blooming, raspberries and blackberries gathered in quantity, followed by peaches, apples, elderberries, and finally, just before the first frost, a long-awaited crop of acorns.

With these seasonal cues on full display all around us, we have loosely themed this issue around a few 'earth skills' which might have been familiar to the wild Drúedain: of all Tolkien's cultures, it is these who seem most 'in tune' with such natural rhythms.

We hope you will enjoy, and thank you for reading!

-A. Hollis

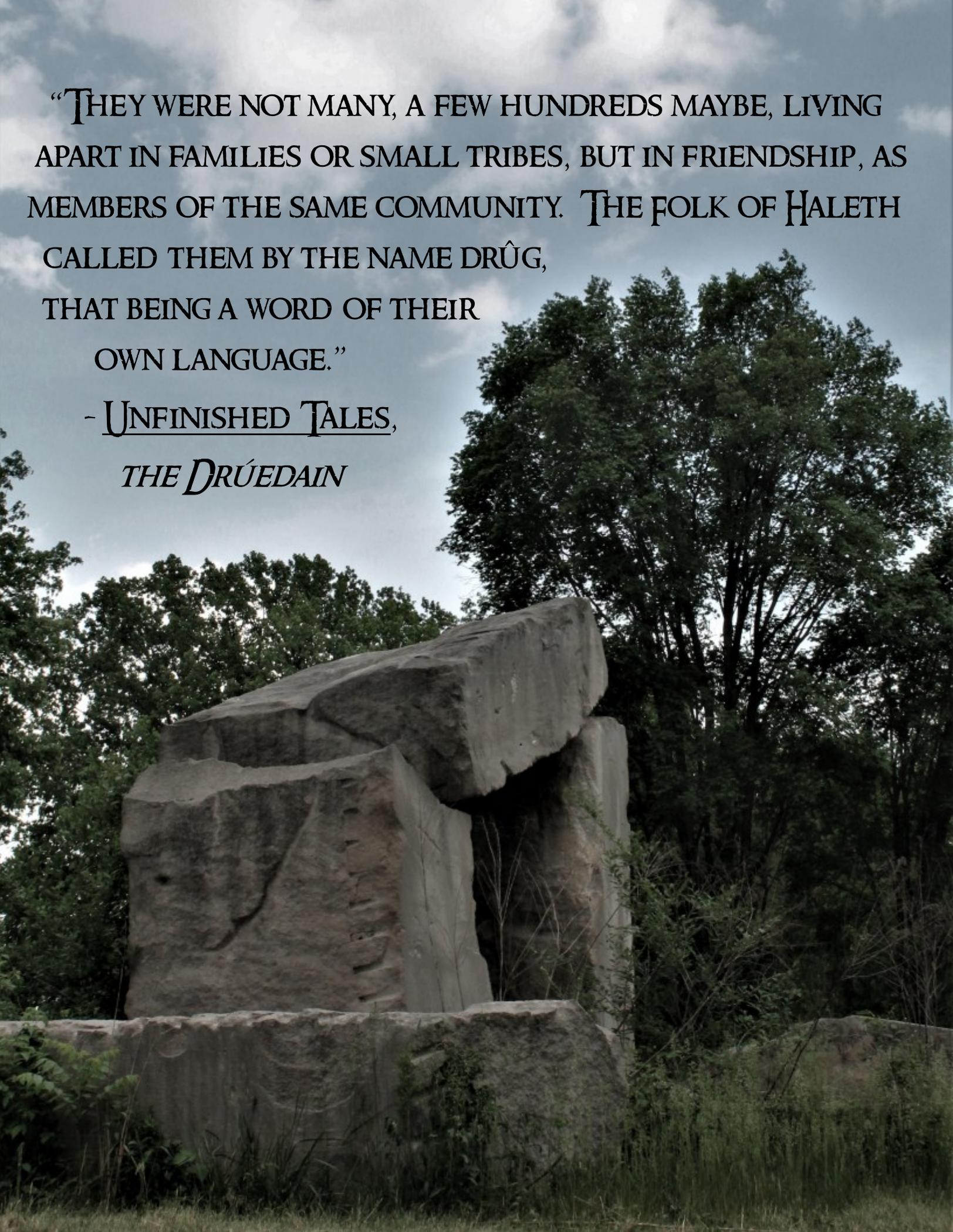
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“THEY WERE NOT MANY, A FEW HUNDREDS MAYBE, LIVING APART IN FAMILIES OR SMALL TRIBES, BUT IN FRIENDSHIP, AS MEMBERS OF THE SAME COMMUNITY. THE FOLK OF HALETH CALLED THEM BY THE NAME DRÛG, THAT BEING A WORD OF THEIR OWN LANGUAGE.”

- UNFINISHED TALES,
THE DRÛEDAIN



PICK A PERSONA: THE DRÚEDAIN

A. HOLLIS

Thus far in this column we have focused on cultures who appear (or are at least referenced) throughout Tolkien's stories. However, by doing so we have unfairly ignored one culture that exists on the periphery, and that appears 'on-screen' in the main canon of stories only once. In this case I refer to the Drúedain, Drúgs, Wild Men, or woodwoses!

Unique among the various kinds of Men, the Drúgs would appear to live in an un-Civilized society, and considering their unique physique, technological level, and attributed 'powers' almost seem like a relict pocket of Middle-earth Neanderthals—"Remnants of an older time...living few and secretly, wild and wary as the beasts" (1). Indeed, the entrance of Neanderthals into Europe through the Middle East parallels the earliest migrations of the Drúedain, who were held by Gondorian historians to have been the first Men to cross the Great River, and came "(it was believed) from lands south of Mordor" (2).

Unlike Tolkien's other cultures, we never see a Wose 'at home', and so we will have to focus on extrapolating the various crafts that are suggested by the text. If you have something of an appropriate build—short, "thick and stumpy" (3)—and a strong interest in traditional 'earth-skills', you may want to consider portraying a Wild Man! Almost from their first introduction, we are told that the Woses are said to be "woodcrafty beyond compare", and one would expect this blanket statement to include a wide variety of indigenous 'survival' expertise such as tracking, hunting, edible and medicinal plants, shelter building, and the use of traps and

snares. In several of his later pieces written to help flesh out this culture, Tolkien does include references to several of these aboriginal skills, which we will here attempt to unpack.

-Like the Dwarves, the *Drughu* (their own name for themselves (4) seem to practice a non-agrarian lifestyle, and presumably live entirely by hunting or gathering; those living beyond Gondor's western frontier are specifically described as "fisher-folk" (5). With this in mind, we can imagine that a large part of their livelihood would require skill in working with **natural fibers**. This is further suggested by Ghân-buri-Ghân, who is depicted wearing "grass" around his waist, presumably as some sort of skirt (6). A wide variety of European fibrous plants (many mentioned by Tolkien) have been utilized in the past to yield useful cordage or weaving materials, including nettles, reeds and rushes, and the inner bark of elm, willow, linden, poplar, maple, and alder. (7).

From the descriptions of the western Drúedain as "fishers and fowlers", it would seem likely that **net-making** would be a highly practical use of their fiber skills. The making of decoys for fowling could also involve fibrous plants, as seen in this Native American example, made of bulrushes:



Lovelock Cave (Nevada, USA) duck decoy: approximately 2,000 years old.

-If lashed and woven decoys are not to your liking, perhaps one could also make use of another Drûg skill, **wood carving**. They are said to be extremely talented wood and stone carvers, not only of toys and ornaments, but also lifelike carvings of themselves or Orcs (placed at borders to scare away their enemies) (8). It seems logical that something as practical as wooden decoys would be easily accomplished by a skilled Wild Man. We are told that as early as the First Age (keeping with their Stone Age portrayal) they possessed “small tools of flint for scraping and cutting” whose use was retained due to the cost and difficulty of acquiring metal goods. However, when such wares became more commonplace in Beleriand (due to connections with Elves and Dwarves), the Drûgs were able to more freely practice their talents, and that “the most skilled among them could give vivid semblance of life” to their carved figures (9). (It is unknown when the Pûkel-Men of Dunharrow were created, and if they were accomplished using stone or metal tools).



An ivory horse carving from Vogelherd, Germany (c.30 KYA)

-The western Drûgs (dwelling on the shores between the Isen and Greyflood) surviving into the Third Age are described as “fairly numerous but barbarous” tribes of “fisher-folk” (10). We would expect therefore that they would be involved in a healthy industry of producing ‘primitive’ **angling tackle**—hooks, line, weights, weirs, nets, baskets, etc.

-We are told that the Drúedain would use their know-how of **pigments** (mostly-plant-based) to decorate wood, stone, and carved faces with pictures and designs (11). While it seems that most cave art we are familiar with was accomplished using mineral pigments such as red and yellow ochres and black hematite, possible pigment-bearing plants include yarrow, weld, woad, madder, and elderberry.



A selection of motifs found on British megaliths. Might Drúedain designs have looked similar?

-While Elvish-derived forms of writing “were never learned by them”, Drúedain nonverbal communication took two forms. First was “the use of a number of signs, for the most part simple, for the marking of trails or the giving of information and warning” (12). Perhaps these took similar form to ‘painted tree’ examples used by Native Americans of the eastern woodlands?

A second form of long-distance communication practiced (at least by the Drûgs of Anorien) was drumming, and “thus they talk together from afar” (13). Therefore, the craft of **drum-making** could be fascinating to learn and demonstrate in a Wild Man persona. Making such instruments would likely also necessitate the use of **rawhide** for drum-heads. Other **tanning** methods could be used to produce their tents and shelters, which were “lightly built round the trunks of large trees.”

While it may be tempting to think of the Woses as ‘cavemen’, we are told that their use of caves was “mainly as store-houses, only occupied as

dwelling-ings and sleeping-places in severe weather” (14). However, it seems that those who harried Saruman’s forces after the battles of the Fords of Isen did so “from the caves where they dwelt” (15).

-Although Ghân-buri-Ghân is only dressed in a ‘grass skirt’, one Wild Man of the First Age is elsewhere described as wearing “high buskins”, which the Woses used “in hard country among thorns or rocks” (16). While the western Drûgs living between the rivers Isen and Greyflood are from marshy areas, it is possible that those who escorted the Rohirrim through Gondor’s Stonewain Valley could have worn such footwear.

-As we see in other indigenous cultures, one key skill that would be necessary for Drúedain survival was that of **tracking**, both of prey and of enemies. This would be a perfect skillset to learn, practice, demonstrate, and teach others, as we are told that they “*had a marvelous (sic) skill as trackers of all living creatures, and they taught to their friends what they could of their craft; but their pupils did not equal them, for the Drúedain used their scent, like hounds save that they were also keen-eyed. They boasted that they could smell an Orc to windward further away than other Men could see them, and could follow its scent for weeks except through running water.*” (17).

Similarly, it is said that “Their knowledge of all growing things was almost equal to that of the Elves (though untaught by them)” (18), and so we would expect an individual pursuing a Drúedain persona would have an extensive understanding of wild edible and medicinal plants and fungi—a topic that could fill a column all on its own! However, it would seem that they are not vegetarians, and have knowledge of butchery, as Ghân-buri-Ghân likens the quarrying of rock to “hunters [carving] beast-flesh.” (19).

Finally, we are also told that the Woses use poisoned arrows, which would naturally require the skills of a **bowyer** and **fletcher**. However, these poisons are not used for hunting, as they had “a law against the use of all **poisons** for the hurt of any living creatures, even those who had done them injury—save only Orcs, whose poisoned darts they countered with others more deadly” (20). While the Woses’ use of poisoned darts seems known to the neighboring Rohirrim and Second Age inhabitants of Enedwaith, the prohibition against their use on non-orcs was apparently unknown. ✨

References:

- (1) The Lord of the Rings, Book V: Chapter 5
- (2) Unfinished Tales, Part 4:Chapter I - The Druedain: Further Notes
- (3) LR V:5
- (4) UT 4:I note 6
- (5) UT 3:V:Appendix i; UT 4:I note 13.
- (6) LR V:5
- (7) www.museum-albersdorf.de/bast/bastueber.htm Textile Materials of the Stoneage
- (8) UT 4:I
- (9) *ibid.*
- (10) UT Part 2: IV
- (11) *ibid.*
- (12) *ibid.*
- (13) LR V:5; VI:6
- (14) UT Part 4:I.
- (15) *ibid.*: Notes 9 and 13
- (16) UT Part 4:I
- (17) *ibid.*
- (18) *ibid.*
- (19) LR V:5
- (20) UT 4:I, note 9

FIRECRAFTING:

TOOLS FOR LIGHTING AFTER STORMS

G. LAMMERS

Most of us have done it: while camped under a fine shelter, we watch the rain fall and the wind blow in relative comfort. Then morning comes, and we realize that all of the remaining firewood we had collected remained outside and is now soaked. Or maybe you simply planned a trip, only for it to rain a day or two before, and everything still seems damp. Cold cheese and dried fruit may sustain life, but even Tuor himself would have gladly risked death “...for mastery of [...] fire.” (Unfinished Tales: Of Tuor and His Coming to Gondolin), and so its importance stands. Nothing buoys the spirit like a hot blaze, and few things settle as well in an empty stomach than a freshly-cooked meal, even if it be of trail rations.



As you travel during the day, the first thing to focus on is looking *up*. Man as a whole is dreadfully unaware of what is above at any particular time, and so some of the best materials are missed. The first treasures I look for are hanging branches. Particularly in thicker woods with brushy undergrowth, it is not at all uncommon to find dead hanging branches that have fallen from their parent trees but have not yet hit the ground. They will likely be damp on the outside, but they have less chance of being soaked through, as water runs off them more than it sits and has fewer chances to soak in. We'll discuss getting to the dry insides further on.

Another treasure to keep your eyes up for this time of year are birds' nests. No, I'm not talking about stealing birds' homes. By this time in the year, birds are finished with their nests, as they only serve a purpose for fledging nestlings. This means that we have another up-off-the-ground bit of tinder that is ready to burn just by virtue of the tiny size of the material. If you are looking for them, you will see a surprising number in the crotches of lower trees and won't have to climb to unsafe heights to get your hands on one or two.

Third, and perhaps the most important gem to be sought, is *fatwood*. In order to locate fatwood, a bit of tree biology must first be understood. Conifers, such as Pines, Spruce, Juniper, Cedars, etc. all have in common a rather burnable sap, known for the purpose as “pitch”. It's a rather sticky sap as compared to that from deciduous

trees, and runs in noticeably greater quantities and at much greater thicknesses than most. Chief of all of these in pitch production is the family of Pines, but just about any woodland conifer will do.

When a tree (any tree) receives a wound, be it a scrape from a falling neighbor, a break when a limb grows too heavy, a lightning strike, or a limb chopped off with an axe, the tree has an automatic response: to compartmentalize the wound. Trees do not heal; they simply package the wounded area from all sides so the wound is no longer an entry point for disease. When a limb dies, the tree treats this as a wound, and closes itself off from the dead limb on the inside first. When a limb dies on a conifer, there is no longer a functioning phloem to carry the sap along the branch, and the sap drains out. If the limb droops downwards, you may see drops of hardened pitch near the tips. If the branch is sloped upwards, however, our treasure may be found.



What you are looking for is a clearly dead limb on a pine or similar conifer that slopes upward away from the trunk, with the bark still intact. If the bark remains and the tree has successfully compartmentalized where the branch attach-

es to the trunk, the sap will settle at the base of the branch instead of draining out. This higher concentration of pitch is known as fatwood, and it is a hot-burning and long-lasting fuel material.

This particular branch will require a short climb, but has a high likelihood of success.



Here I have cut this limb off with a handsaw for better clarity to show what we're seeking. On the right side of the cut face, we see a dark amber-colored ring along the edge. This was the bottom of the branch where it connected to the tree; right where gravity led all that sap. Now, we'll take our Seax or small axe and chip away at that edge to reveal the beautiful, hard,



smooth, amber pine pitch in all its concentrated glory.

Further chopping renders it into chips useful for fire lighting:



Now, let's put it all together. We'll start by prepping our fuel: I found a nice piece of 3" hanging deadwood which I've beat against a tree a few times to break into useable lengths.



I then hammer my Seax through the wood with a scrap log to split it lengthwise several times, uncovering the largely dry interior.

Gathering my materials together, I set up my fire to get heat onto the fatwood and dry the interior wood as directly as possible. I don't particularly care for 'teepees' and other various "fire lays" that seem to overcomplicate

things...lean it all up on a piece of larger fuel, and gently stuff the underside with your tinder, in this case the birds' nests we found, laced with fatwood.



Lighting the whole mess is now a simple process, but seeing the fatwood catch and burn so hot (and long) is very satisfying. It's often found in quantities greater than needed for a single fire, so stowing some in your tinder box for next time is wise.

You have many other options found naturally in the woods for starting a fire in tricky conditions...I encourage you to be aware of what's dry and get creative with burnable material! ✨

BIRCH OIL FOR FUN AND PROFIT

A. HOLLIS

Throughout my travels, I have found that there are few finer firestarting materials than birch bark (eastern juniper/cedar is my other go-to tinder of choice). Much like the previously-discussed ‘fatwood’ or ‘pitch pine’, birch bark burns hot with a smoky flame—unsurprising, since they both contain flammable oils. In birch, the oil impregnates the bark and serves to repel water from outside the tree, but also keep moisture *in* the wood—as a result, I often find birch logs washed up on the riverbank, in which the bark is nearly pristine but the wood inside is soggy and rotting.

Birch oil is one of those really *wild* (in the true opposite-of-domesticated meaning of the word) things—like smoked braintanned leather and a spit of freshly roasted meat—that should be right at home in one’s serious re-creation of Tolkien’s world. Birch trees were found in late Third Age Middle-earth in several locations—the Shire, around Rivendell, the eastern Eryn Muiil (where they are ‘twisted’), both the eastern and western slopes of the southern Misty Mountains, as well as in Fangorn Forest.

Birch oil has a plethora of practical uses: treating leather, protecting wooden tools, repelling insects, medicinally as an antifungal, or for just imparting an authentically ancient scent to things. If heated further, it becomes a sticky tar, which has been used as a ‘glue’ for thousands of years. Ötzi the Iceman is perhaps its most well-known user: his copper axe was secured in its handle using birch tar and rawhide. Recent research has also revealed that Neanderthals more often used birch tar (as opposed to conifer resins) to haft stone tools, making it a good

fit for a possible Drúedain impression.

Luckily, extracting this oil is a simple, straightforward process and is well worth the time it takes. The big reveal at the end also never fails to impress people who are unfamiliar with it!

To cook up a batch of birch oil, you will need:

-Birch bark, of course! I have had great success with the thick bark of white/paper birches (*Betula papyrifera*). That of the more papery river birch (*B. nigra*), requires much more bark to produce a similar quantity of oil, and this oil seems to be slightly thinner.

-Soft clay: I get mine fresh out of the riverbank.

-A large airtight container with a hole punched in the bottom. A gallon paintcan works great if you can find them, though they are becoming rare as many are switching to plastic. The next best thing is a large cookie or popcorn tin with a tight-fitting lid. These only last for two or three batches, but are ubiquitous at secondhand for a dollar or two, which is quite economical. You will need to punch or drill a ~1/4” hole centered in the bottom of this tin.

-A second, smaller container An aluminum soda can is the best. A soup tin will lose precious oil in the corrugated sides, and ceramic containers like coffee mugs retain too much heat and will keep cooking your oil after it is collected (this can be a plus, if you want birch tar at the end). If you use a soda can, you will also need a ‘P38’-type can opener and a strong pair of shears.

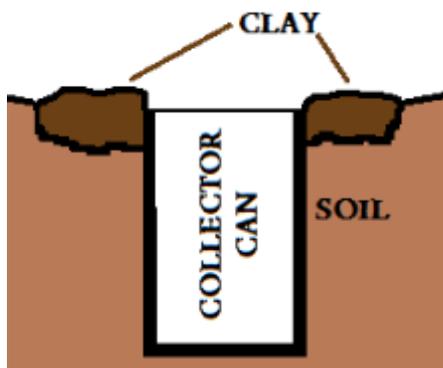
The first step is to pack your bark can, and I mean really *pack* it—try to fill up all the available space with bark. The only thing to really be

aware of is that the bark needs to be oriented as it grew on the tree—the bands need to be horizontal, not wrapped up longways. The oil is used to flowing *up* the bark, and it will come out easier if it is allowed to flow in the same direction in the can. I usually make a tight bundle, tie with jute twine, squeeze it into the can, and then fill in the open spaces with smaller pieces rolled up:



Now we'll need to prepare our collector can. Use the can opener to take the top off the soda can. This leaves the lip strong, but will need removing after cooking is over.

Dig a hole deep enough to hold the collector can. Fill in the hole around the can with soil to within an inch of the top of the can.



Next, use clay to make a 'donut' around the mouth of the can, that will stand a little higher than the mouth—this will form a seal with the bottom of the bark can shortly:



Put the lid on your bark can and press it onto the clay around your soda can. Now you build the soil back up, covering about 1-1 ½ inches of the bottom of the bark can to help keep it steady. You don't want to bury the bark can too deep, which can prevent the bark inside from getting properly 'cooked'.



The key is for the container to create a hot, oxygen-deprived environment. Authentically, you could get the same results by surrounding

the dense bark bundle with a sod or clay dome. Now all that's left to do is build a stick fire. You want the fire to be HOT (650° F or so) and all around the bark can, and above it too, so that the bark can be evenly heated. What's happening inside is *dry* distillation—the oil in the bark is being vaporized in the heat, then condensing and running down the sides to the bottom and into the collection can underneath. It's pretty incredible, and doubly so when you think of the trial and error it must have taken our ancient ancestors to figure the process out.

Making birch oil is a nice way to spend an afternoon, and unlike when smoking buckskin, you don't have to keep a close eye on it: multitask by boiling water on the fire, straightening arrows on the coals, or just patching moccasins. I usually let my batches go for about three hours, to allow enough time for all the oils to be extracted, so collect an appropriate amount of sticks before you begin.

Once the time is up, scrape the hot ashes to the side and carefully dig out the bottom of the bark can. Twisting can help to break the seal with the (now-bisque-fired) clay and lessens the chances that you'll have a coal or bit of dirt fall



Similar to charred cloth or wood, the bark has become black and crispy, once the volatile oil has been removed

into your precious oil (the smaller mouth is another reason I like to use a soda can).



Lift the bark can out of the way, and you will hopefully be met with the absurdly smoky smell of birch oil wafting from your collector. Now it's a simple matter of lifting the can out of the ground, letting it cool, and then using your shears to cut the mouth of the can out of the way so you can pour it into your final container (if the oil has thickened a bit, set it in the sun for a few minutes and it will heat up enough to pour easily).



That's it! Enjoy the satisfaction of learning a new skill, then go rub some on your hands, tools, leather goods, friends, and enemies! ✨

Is TOLKIEN 'PUNK'?

Tolkien-punk? Are we really going to talk about this? You likely have not escaped the long and ever-growing list of “punk” genres, originating with Cyberpunk in the early 1980s and fractionalizing and expanding to the point that nothing is safe from the suffix. Much of what gets labeled ‘-punk’ today has little to do with the concept as initially envisioned, and is applied across a spectrum of fandoms and interests without much thought. But what does this over-zealously applied hyphenation mean, and is it applicable to Middle-earth and the activities with which we occupy ourselves with in MERS? Would it be blasphemy to call ourselves Ring-punks? Arda-punks? Or do we shun such notions as the devilry of Label-punks?

As the X-punk moniker is comprised of two parts, we will examine both in turn. Where the first half describes the particular setting, there is generally a level of technology and/or culture that is incongruous with the historical period it is modeled after, representing an alternate history, or imagined future one. This technology might be artificially advanced, anachronistic, or akin to magic, being quasi or pseudo-scientific but unexplained, functioning within the rules of its internal fiction and not to be overly questioned. These alternate and hybridized settings then give us genres which take their accepted name from that dominant technology or energy source present, for example, Stone-, Sandal- (Classical), Candle- (Medieval), Clock- (Renaissance/early modern), Steam- (18th- early

E. MEULEMANS AND A. HOLLIS

20th centuries), Diesel- (1920s-40s), Ray- (1930s-50s), Atom- (1940s/50s), Transistor- (1960s-80s), Cyber- (1980s-), and Solarpunk (Present -), to name the more common ones. Each of these often defy ready definition by both adherents and observers, but hold in common fantastic technologies out of their place in time.

If we are to then use this as a measure, we must address the question: what is the technological state of Middle-earth, and does it possess such incongruities? It could conceivably be considered an Iron Age setting, the black metal being fairly widespread and put to utilitarian uses in most of its encountered cultures. Casual fans commonly believe that Middle-earth occupies a ‘Medieval’ setting, though we argue strongly against conflating Middle-earth with the ‘Middle Ages’ for numerous reasons (among them the lack of either a Church or a feudal economy)(1). We are also faced with the whole can of worms that is Númenor—the depiction of which differs considerably when compared in drafts versus published material (rudimentary spacecraft and ironclad battleships eventually were reduced to standard wood-and-canvas ‘galleon’-type ships).

So while Middle-earth seems most analogous to our historical Iron Age, even the most basic Middle-earth technology is often far beyond what is known to have been found in our Primary World history (thanks to differing metallurgy and high Elf ‘tech’). Most importantly we cannot ignore Tolkien’s most influential crea-

tions: Hobbits, who are stated to be essentially pre-industrial English country folk, and thus far outside the expected constraints of an Iron Age society. As if this wasn't enough, we have a wild mix of cultures exhibiting extremes of technology; from the Beornings who are akin to Bronze-age-ish Europeans with access to iron, the Gondorians and their Roman-ish buildings of stone and urban life, to the Drúedain with their grass skirts, stone tools, and poisoned arrows!

So an argument could be made that what makes Tolkien "punk" is specifically his *juxtaposition of different cultures possessing different levels of technology beyond what would be expected*. By this avenue, Middle-earth enters the fantastic, for example: the Faithful Númenoreans landing in western Gondor and meeting indigenous Men. But then, we have had such equivalent instances in our own history, from Norsemen encountering Skrælings on the shores of North America, or Conquistadors meeting the Inca in South America, as well as various advanced nations discovering "primitive" tribes in the Pacific through the middle of the 20th century. Is it so fantastic then, or even uncommon, that there should be such disparate levels of technological development across an entire world? There must be more to the equation.

But is it *Punk*?

(To unabashedly paraphrase Billie Joe Armstrong): Gandalf and Bilbo share a moment, smoking their pipes. Lost in thought, Bilbo asks of Gandalf, "What is punk?" Gandalf takes a long draw on his pipe and puffs out a magnificent smoke ring, exclaiming, "That's punk!" Bilbo gives his best effort at a smoke ring him-

self and says, "So that's punk?" "No," Gandalf replies, "that's trendy."

Each of the x-punk genres today is heavily associated with its own bent on art, fashion, literature, and music, but often those who consider it more deeply must ask, "where is the punk?" To answer that, we must consider what punk is—or was—and how its meaning when married to these settings was originally intended. While a "punk" is typically synonymous with hoodlum or troublemaker, this is the view taken by the establishment, which is exactly counter to the punk themselves, being anarchistic and anti-authoritarian. In short, a punk demonstrates a spirit of individualism, and while they may engage in illegal acts, are not necessarily criminals.

Protagonists in these punk settings tend to be anti-heroes, fighting against a dominant and often dystopic social order, be that a megacorporation, megalomaniacal government, or galactic tyrant.

Are we to suggest then that characters such as Gandalf and Bilbo are "punks"? Without looking too deeply, it might be safe to state that they are certainly "anti-establishment", and evince other attributes such as creativity and individualistic gusto that fit the bill. For his part, when we first meet Bilbo he is the epitome of proud middle-class stuffiness, and finds anything counter to that placid lifestyle an affront, and to be avoided! Toss him in with a wizard and some dwarves, however, and in short order he becomes that very thing he so recently sought to avoid, going so far as to make his living as a burglar!

Likewise, the evils of Middle-earth have been

regularly compared to the worst predations of corrupt corporations and governments, with their surveillance society, endless war, environmental destruction, and legislative overreach. In deference to The Professor's disdain at seeking allegory in his writings, let us not examine this too closely, but consider instead a couple of his personal statements which may be relevant to establishing a case for a punk undertone.

"My political opinions lean more and more to Anarchy (philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control not whiskered men with bombs)—or to 'un-constitutional' Monarchy. I would arrest anybody who uses the word State (in any sense other than the inanimate realm of England and its inhabitants, a thing that has neither power, rights nor mind); and after a chance of recantation, execute them if they remained obstinate!" (2).

Interestingly, for those of us who cannot separate the image of an Oxford professor with the establishment itself, Tolkien presents something of a contradiction here, indicating a preference for a lack of governmental authority, yet willing to apply authority to others—including death—should they disagree! Within Middle-earth itself, Tolkien gives a hint about how these personal views may have influenced some of his world-building, in criticism of a film treatment, where he indicates that in the village of Bree:

"The landlord does not ask Frodo to 'register'! Why should he? There are no police and no government. (Neither do I make him number his rooms.)" (3).

Taken on its own, this would seem to describe Bree as a Libertarian stronghold, where not only is authoritarian intervention not present, but certainly not welcomed! That the innkeeper has a choice as to how to treat his guests, his rooms,

and that the people have an apparent right to self-determination and governance would be perfectly in keeping with an Anarchistic punk lifestyle...or simply representative of the predominant mode of existence for most peoples through history.

As a final note, perhaps one of the only truly agreed upon characteristics of "punk" as a descriptor is that no one can agree on it. When we look at any given fandom, none are immune to claims that something is or isn't belonging within its framework. Those seminal works that delineated their genres, be it Cyberpunk (William Gibson's Neuromancer), Steampunk (The Difference Engine: also Gibson, with Bruce Sterling), or whatever we choose to call (or not) this world of Middle-earth 'reenactment' based upon Tolkien's writings, share in common that aside from some general points, there are few things that bring consensus. The punk element itself in these genres is often now quite diluted, as the inevitable crawl towards commercialization and popularization takes hold. While there often remains a strong component of self-expression and "maker culture," these necessarily align with a self-imposed convention that is itself the antithesis of punk.

So, are Tolkien's writings "punk"? Is "reenacting" a historical period that could have been but never was "punk?" There could be made a case that it very much is at present, and will soon cease to be so, but we leave that determination up to you. ✨

(1) See: "Mythic Neolithic"

(2) Letters, No. 52, 1943. (3) Letters, No. 210, 1958.

ABOUT Us

The Middle-earth Reenactment Society is dedicated to the furthering of J.R.R. Tolkien cultural studies, within the framework of 'historical' reenactment. We exist to recreate the cultures of Middle-earth in both form and function, and to mold ourselves into peoples fitting to associate with and live as members of these fully-realized cultures.

Begun as a part of the middleearthtrangers.org Tolkien re-creation community, the Society now publishes the online quarterly periodical Edge of the Wild, showcasing new research, methods, materials, and instructional articles, while meeting throughout the year at various sites deemed 'wild' enough to still capture the reality and imagination of the wild lands envisioned within the pages of Tolkien's works.

To subscribe to the newsletter and receive future issues of Edge of the Wild sent directly to your inbox, contact us at middleearthreenactmentsociety@gmail.com or find us on Facebook as 'Middle-earth Reenactment Society'.

To apply for membership, please send a head-to-toe portrait photo and a detailed description of your persona!

SOCIETY NEWS

In the future, Facebook subscribers can look forward to footage of working members in the wilds, as the Society has recently acquired some mini-technology for more effective documentation purposes. Stay tuned!

For those interested in learning hands-on earthskills, editor A. Hollis will again be bringing his Natural Cordage workshop to the eighth annual Whipporwill Festival in central Kentucky, July 13-15, 2018.

