

Got Brit?

Appearances

Johan. You know, you couldn' find a braver man. A true hero he was. Held that bridge 'gainst the onslaught o' orcs, givin' those villagers a chance of gettin' out. That winter, when we were caught in them mountains an' we thought we were lost, Johan got us out. That day that skeleton woke up from his grave and went walkabout, an' everyone else fled, Johan stayed behind an' smashed that that boneman to splinters. A real hero he was, an' nobody better than you could have wanted at your side. I suppose that's what makes the whole thing so sad. You see, Johan, despite his strength an' courage was a real ugly feller. Ugly. An' all that heroism couldn' keep him from jumpin' off that bridge into them waters. I suppose that was his weakness, for all his strength o' character, he simply didn' get the respect he deserved on account o' his face."

They say Beauty is Only Skin Deep. It may be in the Old World that Beauty is not even that – that it is almost unknown for most, mostly myth.

Ulla, the youngest daughter of the tailor Werner Uhlrich, was reputed to be the most beautiful woman in the town. Her face was light pale, untouched by the burning sun that aged so many women her age. Her face was unmarred by the ravages of the plague that had tortured the visage of nearly every woman when it had swept through the town five years ago. Most remarkable, was that not only did she still retain the majority of her teeth, but there was even a semblance of order to them. It was said that even the baron's son secretly desired her. Some whispered that he did have her, against her will. Such is the danger of beauty.

In the Old World, beauty is a luxury. Those who must work outdoors are vulnerable to the elements, blistering cold and heat. Poor health may cause one to lose their hair or their skin to turn unhealthy colors, or stunt one's growth. Any number of skin afflictions or blemishes may mar one's skin for life – often exacerbated by the folk cures that are offered. Wealth may shelter one from the whimsy of chance, but it is not enough to ensure beauty.

Beauty is elusive, and there are countless folk-tales that dismiss the importance of beauty. The foolish noble son who spurns one wealthy bride for a beautiful daughter of a poor impoverished knight – only to have his newly-wed wife and his firstborn taken from him during childbirth, and he lives the rest of his short life in abject poverty and loneliness. The wealthy merchant who married a gorgeous woman whose expensive tastes drive him to bankruptcy and then kills himself when she leaves him for a wealthy man. The young maiden who falls for a charming and handsome traveling man who promises to take her to the city, and when he loses interest, abandons her and she lives the rest of her days out as an embittered prostitute. Beauty is considered an illusion, a trifle, less important than marrying a hard working spouse or one that can provide children and care for them. The goal of most marriage and other relationships in the Old World is not to seek fulfillment, but to survive or provide a better standard of living. Love and infatuation in particular,

are viewed as distractions that cloud one's judgment. Those people who are deemed unearthly beautiful are envied, yet also considered superficial, shallow, and more as baubles or ornaments than people.

Players in their heroic adventures all too often forget: life in the Old World is hard. Harsh weather: bitter winters, fickle springs, demanding summers, and foreboding autumns. Diets are bad: malnutrition rife, limited foods available, non-existent knowledge regarding nutrition. Medicine rudimentary: sometimes cures are worse than the affliction. Dangers abound, not just animals and monsters, but fellow humans: abusive spouses and husbands, spiteful neighbors, bitter rivals. Countless ills befall the residents of the Old World, and the harshness of their lives is reflected in their faces.

Marco returned home, after years at sea. The solid ground, still felt strange to walk upon, as if anticipating, and missing the gentle and ever present rocking of the ship. Leaving the ship he called home, he was now returning to the family home he had left so many years ago. Five years to be exact. His sister was waiting in the doorway. Three kids around her. He was startled: younger than him, she looked as old as his mother, standing outside at the oven, waving feebly at him. His sister looked back at him in wonder, seeing a man worn away by the forces, looking as old and haunted as their father who still tilled the fields beneath the merciless sun.

The Perfect Form, Marred

A beautiful person could be someone with most of their teeth still in their mouth, or fewer pox marks than their neighbors. So what can afflict the Old Worlder, PC and non-PC alike?

Blemishes – Patches of warts, pox marks, acne, scars (disease or violence), branding, boils, burn marks, lipomas, sarcomas, rashes, tumors, cysts, and countless other afflictions of the flesh.

Critters – Head and genital lice, scabbies, cooties, fleas, tapeworms, and whatever other little parasites can make the host a home.

Digits – Missing digits on account of accident or frostbite, missing parts of digits, missing fingernails, mangled and unusable fingers, webbed fingers, all can make the most casual of handshakes unpleasant.

Eyes – Cross eyed, lazy eyes, missing eyes, and ruptured vessels

Gangrene – Nothing like a festering, rotting wound or limb to turn the stomach. I would imagine the scars and disfigurement caused by this could be memorable as well.

Hair – A lack of hair, or too much hair, such as one eyebrow, a thick pelt, thick hair all over.

Hunchback – A classic disability: ‘nuff said.

Limbs – Broken, twisted, mangled, and stunted limbs are not only appealing, but directly affect the person’s ability at surviving. Badly mis-set limbs after being broken can add to an unsettling appearance as well.

Nose – Broken, mangled, smashed, or missing noses can create a truly disfigured face.

Stench – Not just unclean, but a generally unsavory scent, or constant bad breath. Digestive disorders resulting in excessive flatulence can make one unappealing to their peers as well.

Teeth – Green, brown, old and moldering. Chipped teeth, missing teeth. Impacted teeth, not only painful but unsightly, especially with the resulting sores and abscesses that may cause an excessively bad odor emitting from the mouth.

Weathered Appearance – the skin can turn to leather. Hard and chaffed, more like treated animal skin than the flesh of a human. Probably spotted, freckled, with all manner of potential cancerous growths.

Integrating Appearance Into the Campaign

Insist that each character choose one if not more disfigurement or blemishes, they don’t all need cleft palates, but once players shake the concept of an airbrushed hero with flowing golden locks you’re that much closer to having a grittier campaign. When running a game, detail the imperfections of PCs. Granted, the characters living in the world might well overlook these things, but the players in the real world would not, this better conveys a sense of the hardship in the Old World. A GM could easily expand upon the deformities and flaws listed above and create a random table for those players who need their arms twisted or a bit of inspiration.

Pyetr was wet, tired and exhausted, yet he kept staring at the innkeep as he spoke. He became more and more angry – the stupid fat fool! Even his appearance irked Pyetr, especially that huge mole on the tip of the innkeep’s nose. It seemed as if the innkeep’s eyes kept crossing as if trying to focus on the brown and hairy obstruction on the tip of the nose. His stupid Imperial accent, with its effeminate lisp merely added to his foolish appearance. Pyetr, fed up, burst out yelling, berating the fool: “Why can’t you just follow the simple instructions”. In truth, it was not the stupidity of the man that fueled Pyetr’s anger, but the appearance that the gods had chosen for him.

Beauty is rare while ugliness prevalent in the Old World. Granted, beauty is relative, and our standards of beauty in the real world would have little equivalent in the Old World. However, the players are of the real world, and as a consequence, they’ll relate to our real world standards of beauty. Convey to them how unattractive and worn down most inhabitants of the world are, how oppressive their lives are and how it prematurely ages

them, the young grey, backs bow and bend under labor, and the good die young (and ugly).

Pyetr laughed as he pursued his foe. The fool with the clubfoot! Some great chase this was! How far did he think he would go! Pyetr easily caught up with the fleeing subject, who turned in time, his horrid little face twisted in fear, pleading for his life... begging for the little he had. Pyetr barked a harsh cruel laugh – and ran the pitiful figure through with his blade.

Few in the Old World would come near the perfect beauty we easily conceive of in the real world, images that we see constantly – therefore people in the world are probably a bit more forgiving of imperfections of other – to a point. Deep in the human heart is prejudice and contempt however, and especially suspicion. And for the truly ugly and misshapen, the Old World is full of suspicion: Why would the gods curse them so? What have they (or their parents and kin) done wrong? Is the monster on the outside a reflection of the monster on the inside? As a consequence, the hideous of the people are the first accused of crimes – allowing players to intervene in defense of the innocent, or to take part in senseless scapegoating.

If there is beauty in the Old World, notions of beauty are probably derived from elven concepts – standards far and beyond the means of even the most extraordinary of humans. As a consequence, nearly everyone falls short of the idyllic beauty, one that is unattainable. Few have the exotic appearance, the intelligence, refinement, and grace that the average high elf has, and as a consequence humans are constantly struggling with a standard of beauty that is beyond them, that leaves them feeling all the more ugly and course.

Humans do have a recourse however. When humans feel themselves inferior they often resort to diminishing others – and here the humans have plenty of others to malign, to burden with traits of ugliness: halflings, dwarfs, gnomes, orcs, goblins, and other humans. This however brings us to a future chapter of Got Grit?: prejudice.

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