

*Aye, it's the Wee Ones, don'tcha know!!*

## *Leprechauns*

The name leprechaun may have derived from the Irish leath bhrogan (shoemaker), although its origins may lie in luacharma'n (Irish for pygmy). These apparently aged, diminutive men are frequently to be found in an intoxicated state, caused by home-brew poteen. However they never become so drunk that the hand which holds the hammer becomes unsteady and their shoemaker's work affected. Leprechauns have also become self-appointed guardians of ancient treasure (left by the Danes when they marauded through Ireland), burying it in crocks or pots. This may be one reason why leprechauns tend to avoid contact with humans whom they regard as foolish, flighty (and greedy?) creatures. If caught by a mortal, he will promise great wealth if allowed to go free. He carries two leather pouches. In one there is a silver shilling, a magical coin that returns to the purse each time it is paid out. In the other he carries a gold coin which he uses to try and bribe his way out of difficult situations. This coin usually turns to leaves or ashes once the leprechaun has parted with it. However, you must never take your eye off him, for he can vanish in an instant.

The leprechaun 'family' appears split into two distinct groups - leprechaun and cluricaun. Cluricauns may steal or borrow almost anything, creating mayhem in houses during the hours of darkness, raiding wine cellars and larders. They will also harness sheep, goats, dogs and even domestic fowl and ride them throughout the country at night.

Although the leprechaun has been described as Ireland's national fairy, this name was originally only used in the north Leinster area. Variants include lurachmain, lurican, lurgadhan.

[<http://www.irelandseye.com/animation/explorer/leprechaun.html>]

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