

Will-o-the-Wisps

Story By: Andrew Frinkle

Meerfus had another contract. He was a wand-making magician, and his customer had requested a wand that made glowing orbs of light at night. It seemed like a fun wand, one that was useful, entertaining, and a little bit spooky. Meerfus thought it reminded him of will-o-the-wisps, which were strange lights created when swamp gases glowed at night. People thought they were spirits or ghosts, but there was a perfect explanation for them! Well, there were other and scarier explanations, too, but that was another story. Regardless, Meerfus had a wand to make.

He began as he always did, with planning. He decided that a glass bulb, much like a lantern fixture, would be a great start. After that, he would fill it with a firefly and swamp gases. Additionally, a branch of a mangrove, a common swamp tree, would make the wand itself. The finishing touches would be some feathers from a great horned owl. Those were touches of the night that would really make the wand work well.

Meerfus sent his young assistant, Duncan, to a friend's house. His friend was a bird keeper that specialized in falcons, hawks, and owls. He often supplied Meerfus with feathers for wands and owed him a few favors for a wand he'd received last autumn. While Duncan was fetching the feathers, he went and found a glassblower who could make him a glass bulb the size he needed. He had to pay good silver for that.

Once Duncan returned with the feathers and Meerfus had the bulb, they caught a ride on the back of a hay wagon that was headed toward the nearest swamp. It was a long and bumpy ride, but it gave Meerfus time to quiz Duncan on his wand-making skills.

At the swamp, Meerfus, who didn't much care to get his robes or beard wet, sent Duncan out in a small canoe they rented for a few copper coins. Duncan paddled around collecting branches covered in tree moss. It was good to get several, in case the first one didn't work. Then, he filled the glass bulb with swamp air and a single firefly, and then he capped it off with a cork.

With all the supplies, they headed straight home. As they walked, Duncan listened to Meerfus' stories about wand-making, learning all he could. Back at Meerfus' workshop, all that remained was the assembly of the wand and the magic words.

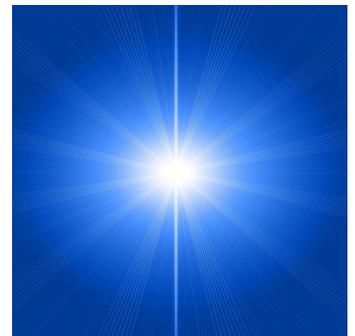
With strands of greenish-gray, stringy moss, Meerfus tied the feathers to the swamp stick he chose for the wand. Then, he uncorked the bulb and shoved the end of the stick up into it quickly to prevent the firefly or the gases from escaping. He stuffed more moss around the mouth of the bulb to prevent leakage.

With a few moments' thought, he came up with the magic words: *Glowingus Orbus Makus!* Magic infused the wand, forever sealing the ingredients together. A few quick casts of the wrist sent green, blue, and yellow balls of light floating through the air.

"Success, Duncan! We'll have another satisfied customer to be certain."

Duncan grinned. "Yes, sir. We've done it again."

Meerfus opened his mouth to argue that it was all him, but he smiled. "Yes, you were quite helpful. Good work, Duncan."



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Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. The wand Meerfus is going to make will do what?
 - A. make fireworks
 - B. make balls of light
 - C. make campfires
 - D. make explosions
2. What does Meerfus say *really* causes will-o-the-wisps in swamps?
 - A. swamp gases
 - B. fireflies
 - C. owls
 - D. imaginations
3. What does Meerfus go collect while Duncan gets feathers?
 - A. a stick
 - B. moss
 - C. gases
 - D. glass bulb
4. What does Duncan have to get in the swamp?
 - A. a mossy stick, gases, and a lightning bug
 - B. a mossy stick, feathers, and a glass bulb
 - C. a lightning bug, gases, and a sample of water
 - D. feathers, a glass bulb, and a mossy stick
5. What colors of lights does the finished wand make?
 - A. black, purple, and green
 - B. yellow, green, and red
 - C. green, yellow, and blue
 - D. orange, red, and yellow

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