

SYLVAN SECRETS

CAMPAIGNS FEATURING THE FEY

Often showcase flashy battles with sprites, satyrs, and dryads. However, such campaigns are incomplete without the mystique of superstition and portents of the inexplicable. Fey spirits invisibly hide in the twilight between worlds; in many ways, it is best to tell their stories through memorable characters, exploration, and ambiance—not a straight-up slugfest.

Armed with drag-and-drop options found herein, like NPC personality traits, environmental objects, faerie antics, and sylvan boons, GMs can effortlessly weave a complete faerie tale.



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FEY-TOUCHED NPCs

Fey intervention in mortal life is rare but spectacular, and significantly alters a person's affect and motivations. GMs can represent NPCs with such deep or subtle fey connections by granting them one or more of these traits.

Appearance

1d6 Feature

- 1 Sylvan jewelry, tattoos, or ornamentation
- 2 Floor-length hair filled with flowers.
- 3 Radiance; light always hits them perfectly.
- 4 Exceptionally pointy ears.
- 5 Scars that look and feel like tree bark.
- 6 Body part of an animal; rabbit paws for hands, cat ears, pig tail, or donkey feet.

Bonds

1d8 Feature

- 1 Superstitious of faeries; goes out of the way to appease the fey.
- 2 A relative disappeared under mysterious (fey) circumstances.
- 3 A faerie intervened in his/her love life.
- 4 Dances with pixies on moonlit nights.
- 5 Blackmailed by faerie who knows his/her darkest secret.
- 6 Family heirloom blessed by the fey.
- 7 Family heirloom baleful to the fey.
- 8 Family has a pact with local faerie lord.

Flaws

1d6 Feature

- 1 Subjected a family member to faerie wrath to save self.
- 2 Obsessively chases faeries at every sign or opportunity.
- 3 Plotting to steal a faerie treasure.
- 4 Family is cursed by a local faerie lord.
- 5 Sleepless and paranoid due to faerie haunting.
- 6 Hatred for all things fey.

ENVIRONMENTAL OBJECTS

When players are exploring a wilderness scene and you want to add a dose of fey flavor, roll on this table and add the appropriate object to the scene. The objects are detailed below.

Each object when encountered requires a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) or (Nature) check to discern its nature.

Fey Objects

1d6 Random Object

- 1 Grendelwood
- 2 Fey Ward
- 3 Faerie Gate
- 4 Somnus Bush
- 5 Leyline
- 6 Roll twice; ignore additional results of 6



Open Game Content

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GRENDDELWOOD

Much like how demons and ghosts possess mortals, sometimes faeries possess plants. When fey spiritually inhabit a hardwood tree, it is known as a grendelwood and produces strange growths. Possession by fey is not innately harmful to the tree, though most growths draw their nutrients parasitically from their host. Some mortals consider finding a fey-inhabited tree to be one of nature's blessings, but others avoid and revere grendelwoods for fear of the fey.

Grendelwoods are marked by a variety of growths, determined from the table below:

1d6 Grendelwood Growth

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Mistletoe |
| 2 | Strawberries |
| 3 | Purple and orange fruits (cause indigestion) |
| 4 | Fleshy, red vines (cause skin rash) |
| 5 | Corn stalks that produce bread |
| 6 | The bark is contorted into a speaking face |

FEY WARDS

The antics of fey tricksters are not always welcome, and to protect communities and individuals, wards are sometimes constructed to repel the fey. Cold iron is one of the most common fey wards, and includes horseshoes nailed to doors, crop shears hung on a mantle, daggers under door mats, iron statues, and a lone nail in the pocket. Others fey wards include nandina berries and smears of tar.

A fey ward can protect a single person, an entry way, a small room, or 15-foot sphere originating from the object. A character carrying a fey ward or within the area one protects cannot be targeted by fey antics or receive sylvan favor. Additionally, fey with 9 hit points or fewer cannot enter areas protected by a fey ward.

FAERIE GATE

Faeries pass invisibly between their world and the mortal world all the time. They do so through faerie gates, which are clearly wondrous to mortal eyes but inert to them. These gates

take many forms, including mushrooms in a "fairy ring," archways woven from living trees, ancient reflecting pools, wells and bridges built from hewn quartz, druidic monoliths, and other landmarks.

Only fey (or mortals with sylvan favor, see below) can activate and travel through a faerie gate. Each faerie gate is linked to a corresponding gate on the opposite plane; even if two faerie gates are nearby in the mortal world, their corresponding gates in the realm of faerie may be quite distant.

SOMNUS BUSH

This viney bush produces brilliant pink and yellow orchid-like flowers all year around (however, when it snows the flowers close). Somnus bushes may be found near enchanted meadows, or they may overgrow to consume ancient landmarks. Their flowers produce an intoxicatingly sweet scent which is harmless to faeries and beasts, but lulls mortals to sleep.

Humanoids who come within 15 feet of the bush must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw; those who fail must spend their next movement drawing closer to the bush. Similarly, humanoids adjacent to or in the same space of the bush must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or fall unconscious. Creatures immune to poison or who cannot smell are immune to these effects.

LEYLINES

A leyline is like a river or a blood vessel for the magical energy the world needs to survive. Faeries and druids often mark leylines; they can appear like dry riverbeds filled with pure white stones, pathways of braided vines, a line of flowers through a field, or invisible rivers of light that shine in the light of the moon. It is tempting to tap into the raw power of the leylines, but inexperienced or addicted spellcasters may get swept away in its arcane currents.

A spellcasting creature who takes a short rest within a leyline can recover one expended spell slot. A creature cannot benefit from this effect

again until dawn of the next day. Each time the creature uses the leyline, the GM rolls 1d6; if the result is equal to or lower than the number of times that creature used the leyline since the last new moon, it is subject to a *true polymorph* spell cast by the leyline (Wisdom save DC 20, no concentration required).

FEY ANTICS

Fey can't help but play pranks on people within their sphere of influence. When entering an area, a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Nature) check lets the character become aware whether the fey might try to pull one over! Once per short or long rest (or during a lull in gameplay) while the party is in such an environment, visit upon a random player character one of these pranks. These pranks do not harm characters directly, but they can provoke laughter as easily as they escalate other dangers.

A word of caution: some of these pranks may constitute "false leads" within the storytelling process. Be sure to use those pranks only when it would directly enhance the sylvan ambiance.

1d6 Random Prank

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| 1 | Trip |
| 2 | Dream Visitation |
| 3 | "Ooh, Shiny!" |
| 4 | Play with Toys |
| 5 | Ready-Made Meal |
| 6 | Impersonation |

TRIP

Use on a character distracted by conversation. An invisible fey spirit tangles target character's feet, such as by tying their boot laces or snaring them in a stray vine. The next time that character moves, they must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone, ending the movement; if the character attempted to run, the DC is instead 12, and on a failure the character also rolls 10 feet in the direction they were headed.

DREAM VISITATION

Use only on a sleeping character. An invisible fey spirit enters the dream of the target player-character, causing vivid dreams and restlessness. That character must make a DC 10 Charisma save or recover 1 hit die fewer during their current long rest. If the character succeeds on the save by 5 or more, they recover 1 additional Hit Die instead.

"OOH, SHINY!"

An invisible fey spirit sends a magical signal, such as a dancing lights or druidcraft effect that only the target character can perceive. This signal directs the character into woodlands, away from other people. If the character follows, they must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or get lost in the woods for 1 hour. If the character succeeds the save by 5 or more, they instead discover a faerie gate or a congregation of dancing pixies.

PLAY WITH TOYS

Invisible fey spirits find unattended toys (or interesting items like cutlery or adventuring gear) owned by the target player and play with them. The items float and appear manipulated within 5 feet of their original resting spot. This activity can be as quiet as a whisper or as loud clanging bells. Upon establishing line of sight with a player character, the items drop harmlessly to the ground and the effect ends.

Variants. The fey pester target the player character by rotating face-shaped items and reflective surfaces in their direction. The effect ends on a DC 10 Wisdom save.

READY-MADE MEAL

While nobody is looking, an invisible fey spirit prepares food. When the characters enter the scene, it appears very inviting, if oddly absent of a cook. The character must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw, or risk believing this food is safe to eat. On a success, or the player realizes that this is a fey trick, the character realizes such as well. A character that eats the

meal without offering a faerie appeasement is immediately subject to another fey prank, and has disadvantage on its saving throw.

IMPERSONATION

A faerie spirit takes on the visible form of an NPC target character knows. Silently, the fey impersonator draws target character's attention. (The supposed NPC knocks on the PC's door, stares wistfully out a window, or points in a general direction.) The impersonator pantomimes advice to the character, which if taken will lead to misfortune. The character must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw, or risk trusting the impersonator's pantomimed advice. If the player realizes that this is a fey trick, the character automatically succeeds on the saving throw. If the character succeeds on the saving throw by 5 or more, or offers the faerie appeasement, the impersonator's advice is actually helpful or the impersonator hands the PC a useful item worth 5 gp or less. Regardless of success or failure, the fey impersonator mysteriously disappears once the character looks away.

SYLVAN FAVOR

Any time a character would receive inspiration for helping the fey, you can instead grant the player sylvan favor. A character can expend sylvan favor to call on the faeries for aid, or the GM can keep sylvan favor a secret and expend it on behalf of the character's invisible allies.

FOREST FAST-TRAVEL

While exploring a large forest, a character may expend sylvan favor to call on a guiding sprite. The character and up to four other creatures who lock hands can follow the guide through faerie gates and subliminal shortcuts to hop-scotch between worlds. Over all, traveling like this is 4 times faster than a horse on an open field, up to a maximum of 6 hours travel time. The fey guide can drop the party off at the edge of any forests adjoining or contiguous to where they began.

Appeasing Faeries

Traditionally, there are many folk means to offer faeries appeasement. The idea is for mortals to (symbolically or mystically) share with the invisible faeries who need worldly sustenance. Some include:

- ▶ As you pass by, drop a silver coin into wells, fountains, or rivers under bridges.
- ▶ Leave bread, milk, wine, or brandy on the back porch overnight.
- ▶ Leave an open seat at the table or dining area.
- ▶ While milking a cow, shoot the first few squirts on the ground.
- ▶ If you spill salt, pick some up and throw it over your shoulder.

ACTIVATE FAERIE GATE

As an action, a character may expend their sylvan favor to activate a faerie gate. The gate opens a magical portal to the opposite world (mortal world to faerie world, or vice-versa). The portal remains open for 1 minute, allowing passage for that character and up to four other chosen characters.

QUESTION THE TRICKSTER

When a player-character is subject to fey antics, they may expend their sylvan favor to catch the fey spirit in the act. The fey—usually a pixie or a gremlin—materializes, apologizes, and to the best of its ability answers one question the character asks. The fey then disappears.

FEY INTERVENTION

As an action, a character can call on their sylvan ally to cast a druid or warlock spell. The spell is cast using the character's ability scores and proficiency bonus. The spell cast can be any that a druid or warlock of that character could cast (including the warlock's Mystic Arcanum) of any spell level below the maximum. For example, a 1st-level character could only beseech the fey to cast a cantrip, and a 13th-level character could request a 6th-level spell. 🧙‍♂️