

SYLFAN'ESTI ELVES

HISTORY AT A GLANCE

The elves were once revered as guides and teachers of the younger races, but over time those races (particularly humans) outgrew them and created their own empires. Elven influence continued to shrink until the Great Doom, when the armies of evil overran the remaining elven forces. Those that could, escaped through the Feywild to a distant forest that is now their home. Elves today are cautious and absorbed with their own self-protection.

ELVEN HISTORY

The first elves came to this world from the fey realms, back when the mortal world was young and the barriers between worlds were far weaker. The elves were the first to bring civilization to the mortal realms. Skilled in architecture, writing, and magic, they were considered almost godlike by the primitive peoples they encountered.

During this First Age, the elves were sought after by the younger races as guides, teachers, and protectors, and they were pleased to take on this role. The elves built settlements across the realms, living side by side with humans, dwarves and halflings as they taught them many skills and helped defend them against creatures too evil or too savage to share in the wisdom the elves had to offer.

The First Age ended with the great wars against the giants, as the mighty creatures attempted to resist the elven attempts to bring civilization to the lands. Many great elven heroes fell during those wars, but the elves prevailed, pushing the giants into the deep places of the world. It was the defeat of the giants and the ushering in of an age of peace that allowed the younger races, especially humans, to start expanding on their own, and they began to spread beyond the lands directly under elven protection.

THE RISE OF MEN

The elves underestimated how quickly the humans would begin to build their own kingdoms and armies, and how hot headed and aggressive they could become. It was not long before human kingdoms began challenging the elves they used to venerate, fighting wars over territory and resources. Since elves have children so rarely, these wars took a terribly toll on the elven population.

Some human kingdoms allied themselves with the elves and fought against their fellows, but even these allies became a problem for the elves. Since humans bred so quickly, an elven city with a small population of humans would, in a few short centuries, become a human city with a small population of elves.

THE AKKADIAN EMPIRE

In the Second Age, humans began to build great roads, aqueducts, and other marvels that rivaled those of the elves. These Akkadians, as they were known, delved into the mysteries of the universe and sought to understand the arcane mysteries.

They were fiercely ambitious and had a raw desire for power that worried the elves. Many elves began to fear they had made a mistake in teaching the humans so much. They began to withhold their secrets, and increasingly withdrew from human lands.

Over many centuries, elven settlements were abandoned and overtaken by younger races. The Akkadian Empire grew in power and influence until it ruled most of the realms, while the elves withdrew to a single small kingdom (known now as the Old Kingdom), guarding their most powerful magical secrets within.

THE GREAT DOOM

The Third Age, also called the Dark Ages, began with the Great Doom that unleashed waves of evil fiends and aberrations from the Abyss into the lands of the elves and humans alike. No one knows what caused it, but the elves blamed the Akkadians, believing their lust for power had led them to meddle with forces they could not control.

They watched the Akkadian Empire collapse around them and realized the tide of darkness could not be stemmed. As the armies of chaos advanced on their homeland, the remaining elves opened a rift of their own and fled back to the Feywild. Their greatest heroes stayed behind, sacrificing themselves to ensure the safe escape of their people.

While a few older elves considered themselves lucky to escape the mortal realm and chose to remain in the Feywild, most



of the elves believed it was important to return. King Eladin Sunshield, the last king of the Old Kingdom, made a great bargain with Titania, Queen of the Seelie Court. She would offer the elves safe passage through the Feywild back to the mortal realms, and would give them potent defensive magic to protect themselves. In exchange, the king would remain as her consort and plaything.

The elves who returned to the realms appeared in the forests of Sylfan'eth several decades after they had fled. A small sea lay between them and the center of the Great Doom. They planted the magical seed given to them by Titania, which was to grow into the Sun Tree (the El'syl), a massive magical tree that radiated a powerful protective aura. The tree kept the elven lands free of Corruption and evil races dared not approach it. For a thousand years, the elves of Sylfan'eth have attempted to rebuild and fortify their lands, protecting the Sun Tree and limiting their interactions with all but fellow fey creatures.

Personality at a Glance

Elves value peace and serenity and find it uncomfortable to be around anything that disrupts that, including the frantic passions of the younger races.

ELVEN PERSONALITY

Because of their strong fey ancestry and long lifespans, elves think very differently than races native to the mortal realms.

Elves value calm, tranquility, and permanence. Unlike humans, they are content for things to remain as they have always been. They do not value innovation, and passion, ambition, and greed are considered both childish and dangerous.

Elves become more reserved as they age, and adults show only mild emotional reactions. Soft smiles are more common than laughter, and anger is rare. They are sometime seen as remote and unfriendly because of this.

Elves care little for personal possessions, and they have a very loose sense of ownership. Elves tend to share things as needed, and while they do use some money for convenience, the idea of hoarding it or acquiring it for its own sake is very foreign to them.

All elves have an aversion to confined spaces to one degree or another. Their buildings rarely have walls due to this trait, and they are frequently uncomfortable in the dwellings of other races. They are especially averse to tight spaces underground. Elves who are confined for significant periods, especially against their will, can sicken and die.

DREAMLIKE SERENITY

Adult elves prefer to spend their time in a state akin to a waking dream, only partially connected to what is going on around them. During this reverie, their minds freely drift from one topic to another while their body continues to function. While they can speak, work, and create art in this state, they are capable of doing so without devoting much attention or conscious thought to what is happening moment to moment.



This is the primary reason why elves are notoriously bad at keeping track of time. While in their dreamlike state, individual moments blur together in a peaceful haze. An elf might sit down to write a poem and be completely unaware that days or weeks have gone by between one page and the next. While this loss of time might concern a human, an elf wouldn't give it a second thought. With centuries to live, the notion of wasting time is foreign to them.

Elves can bring themselves out of their reverie if necessary, but it takes effort to do so, and they find concentrating on moment to moment events to be taxing and unpleasant. Obviously they do it when sudden threats arise or important decisions need to be made, but elves prefer to deal with these types of disruptions as quickly as possible, so they can return to the peaceful tranquility of their dreamlike state.

THE BURDEN OF LIVING IN THE MOMENT

To an elf, anything that demands constant attention is a burden. They prefer each day (or each decade) to be very much like the last. This is why elves rarely live among the younger races in the modern age. Child races are loud, disruptive, and demand constant attention. The frantic energy of humans and other short-lived races leaves elves feeling strained and over-stimulated, like an adult in a room full of hyperactive children.

This preference for homeostasis and disinterest in the new or surprising is part of the reason why elves do not consistently outperform other races in every area. While a human might master a skill after ten or fifteen years of training, an elf in the same time period may have spent very little time actively paying attention to the skill, performing it precisely but with little improvement from year to year.

Homeland at a Glance

The elves live in an ancient forest called Sylfan'eth. Only fey races like gnomes are allowed in their borders, which they guard jealously. Elves don't need bedrooms and don't like walls. That and the fact that they need very little food to sustain them means that most of their settlements have tiny footprints that would be very difficult for a stranger to notice.

SYLFAN'ETH, THE ELVEN HOMELAND

While there may be a few scattered enclaves of elves hiding in the wild places of the realms, the last known elven homeland is the great forest of Sylfan'eth, neighbor to the eastern human kingdom of Esset.

The elves of Sylfan'eth are the grandchildren of those elves who fled to the Feywild after the fall of the Old Kingdom, and the stories of that panicked exodus have left their mark on the current generation. The current queen, Ulithia Sunshield, wants little to do with the outside world and is focused entirely on protecting the Sun Tree and keeping intruders from elven lands.

While there are settlements at the edges of the forest for trading with nearby humans, none are allowed within the borders of the forest itself. The edges of the forest are guarded by forts built high in the trees, often with small Sun-Tree saplings nearby providing magical enchantments and protection.

As a fey race themselves, gnomes are permitted in elven lands, and they often work as merchants and diplomats between the elves and the nearby humans of Esset. Most of what the elves know of the lands outside their forest comes to them through gnomes.

HIDDEN HOMES

A foreigner to Sylfan'eth could easily walk right past most elven settlements without noticing them. Elven homes and gardens are shaped slowly over time, and are integrated into the surrounding landscape. An elf would prefer to take several decades to grow a tree in a particular place rather than cut one down.

Since elves have few possessions and do not need places to sleep, they do not have recognizable homes. There are communal meeting places where elves enjoy sharing time together, but since elves dislike the confining nature of walls, most of their buildings are made only of arches and pillars, and occasionally roofs. Chests and cupboards nestled into natural hollows of rock or tree provide places for storing important things like books, instruments, and pieces of art.

The center of the capitol is the only place where foreigners would see recognizable buildings close together, though they are still graceful, airy, and highly ornate. Places like the Hall of Knowledge and the Hall of Weapons are built primarily of ironwood, accented with white stone. Other than this handful of structures and the trading posts on the borders, it would be difficult for a foreigner to realize that the forest was actually inhabited, let alone a kingdom.

ELF-BERRIES

Elves do not farm or raise livestock. Elves have limited appetites to begin with, but every communal meeting place has a garden full of fruit, including what other races call elf-berries. These small red berries provide an incredibly rich source of nutrients. A handful provides enough sustenance for a full day. These berries, along with other fruit and wild honey, make up the majority of the elven diet. Elves will occasionally hunt for meat or fish, but only for communal feasts or special occasions.

Elves make a wine from elf berries that is highly prized for its restorative properties as well as its taste. This and elven silk is their main export to the outside world, and both are highly prized. Elf-berry wine acts as a non-magical healing potion and it is considered an especially prestigious drink in the five kingdoms due to its expense.



Religious Beliefs at a Glance

Elves have no pantheon of gods. They are animists, believing that everything in nature has a spirit, including rivers, trees, and even rocks.

When a creature dies or a tree is cut down, elves believe that the spirit is released. The spirit may spend time in the mortal realm, but eventually it returns to Arcadia—the heaven of the faerie realm. There they wait, existing in a spiritual form until they have both the desire and opportunity to be reborn in the mortal realm as new trees or new creatures.

Elves believe that spirits have the opportunity in the mortal realms to grow and improve themselves...something that is not possible in the serene eternity of Arcadia. Spirits who successfully improve themselves while in the mortal realms can be reborn as more sophisticated creatures, with the eventual goal of being reborn as the most enlightened of fey beings.

Of course, elves believe that they themselves are near the top of the great chain of being, and that the spirits of younger races aspire to be reborn as elves. Elves see their continued existence in the mortal realms as a responsibility—without the birth of new elven children, spirits in Arcadia may be stalled on their journey of self-improvement.

PLAYER CHARACTER MOTIVATION

It is a rare elf indeed who chooses to go on adventures seeking wealth and excitement. You will need to decide what makes your character different from the norm.

Adolescent. One possibility is that your character is very young, in elven terms. Elven adolescence lasts for several decades after the age of thirty, and immature elves have yet to achieve the solemn tranquility of their elders. They are a little more human-like in their interest in the outside world, and their eagerness to test themselves against it.

Sylvan Curiosity. While half-human elves are well known, elves often have dalliances with other fey races. A brief relationship with a water nymph or dryad has been known to result in an elf who sees the world somewhat differently than normal, giving them a sense of wanderlust or inquisitiveness that might lead them to explore the outside world.

Compulsion. It's also possible that your elf is a reluctant adventurer. He may have been exiled from Sylfan'eth for some serious crime, or she may believe that action is necessary to help protect her people from future attack. Most of the powerful elven heroes did not make the crossing through the Feywild, and so the knowledge of high level spells and other secrets of the Old Kingdom has been lost. Perhaps your character is on a quest to search for this knowledge in ancient elven ruins.

Ambassador. Not all elves agree with the xenophobic approach of Queen Ulithia. Some think closer alliances with the younger races is the key to elven success. Your character might be one of these elves who take it upon themselves to travel in the human lands to learn more about them and spread goodwill.

DEALING WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Since the Dark Ages, it has been extremely rare to see elves living among humans. Elves outside Sylfan'eth will be viewed with suspicion or quiet awe depending on the viewer, but you can expect to draw attention anywhere but the most cosmopolitan cities in the five kingdoms.

Elven Magic at a Glance

As fey creatures, elves have a strong connection to the magic of the faerie realm. Druids are the most common kind of spellcaster in elven lands, and they are highly respected. Arcane spellcasters are more rare among elves. Those that exist are likely to be fey bloodline sorcerers, or warlocks with an archfey patron.

Learning magic from books is a human invention, so an elven wizard would be unusual indeed, and probably would not be welcome in elven lands—elves are particularly suspicious of human magic, still blaming it for the Great Doom.

Elven warlocks that made a pact with a fiend or old one would be seen as a threat and exiled or killed.

Since elves do not worship gods, they do not typically become clerics.

GAME MECHANICS

Subraces. Although there is only one remaining settlement of elves in the realms, you may pick either high elf or wood elf for your character. These represent different ancestral bloodlines or natural talents and are not seen as being separate races.

Captivity. After every full day spent in captivity, an elf must make a Constitution saving throw or gain a level of Exhaustion. Elves can literally die from being imprisoned.

Moonvision. Elven darkvision is replaced with moonvision. This works just like darkvision in nighttime conditions outdoors, but does not work in the deep darkness of caves.

